

# THE CAGE

by

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London

HODDER & STOUGHTON

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First printed 1962

MADE AND PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN FOR  
HODDER AND STOUGHTON LIMITED, LONDON  
BY C TINLING AND CO LIMITED, LIVERPOOL  
LONDON AND PRESCOT

## Chapter One

WHEN Heather came back in the early months of that year she was full of hope. Not unreasonable euphoric hope but hope based on new ideas, new health, a new belief in her power to overcome difficulties—because she knew there would be these.

Driving from the airport into the streets of bright skyscrapers, she was pleased by the city. She had never felt much for it before, a piece of background furniture in the mind, as unimportant as her parents' furniture, a place to go to school but leave with relief for the hills and farms, their own farm . . . That day she saw it for the first time as somewhere she might come to like or dislike. She thought she might like it a lot.

She liked the bright sunlight on the blues and reds of the new tall buildings, the sense of youth and energy their clean white concrete gave so that she could not regret the changes but was excited by them. The place was so changed that sometimes for a whole street she did not know where she was and once felt a moment's panic that she had left the plane at the wrong airport. This was where she would start her new life and she was glad it gave her such spontaneous happiness. She was sure it was spontaneous.

She wound down the window, letting the warm air blow in and cool her. Already on the short walk from the plane to the new airport terminal she had felt the hot sun on her face and her English raincoat, though it was only nine in the morning, so different from the soft English sun which had always seemed to shine through a white haze. Here it would grow more intense till the afternoon would swim and shimmer. On the airport road she had screwed up her eyes for the glare of the Athi Plain. There had been a zebra by the

roadside, its four legs straight and stiff, not collapsed in death but swollen like a stuffed toy. As they passed she had glimpsed the raw flesh on one buttock where the car had torn the skin, had been filled with anger at the way they crashed and killed and drove on, the way all men . . . But she had clenched her small fists and pushed back the tears so that now only a faint uneasiness remained that she should have felt already the hopeless anger which could do her such harm.

Out from the city centre, into the swamp, a valley of lank grass and maize shambas, the site of the African village where they had dug up twenty loyalists, many with their hands cut off. Uphill to a road of low yellow houses with Indian children playing in the dust under pillared doorways and pink blossoming trees growing out of the worn sidewalk. Turn left at the Catholic Cathedral, two more quick turns and another complete change to deep green tree-shaded gardens of European bungalows, their red tiled roofs and grey stone walls to be seen occasionally between thick shrubberies of bougain-villaea, frangipane and oleander. At each drive entrance a white nameboard—and suddenly one reading “H. CAREW”.

It was a shock to see her own name like that—she had forgotten that she would be so labelled. It made her return more defiant than she had intended and she instinctively wanted to postpone committing herself to a position behind this nameboard which she was not sure she could defend; but already the taxi was passing it, circling the gravel drive in front of the low white house. That was a shock too.

It was so big, making her feel already depressed and responsible. She had imagined some small guest house where she could rest and gain strength, gradually venturing out with more confidence. She blamed her parents for choosing something so ostentatiously generous, as if to prove they were giving her the best possible chance to get better but at the same time make this impossible. She did not want to be burdened with such a reminder of their generosity, knowing that she must succeed by her own efforts.



She sat on a bench in the garden in the cool shade of the spreading avocado.

Unlike the houses she had passed it was old, with olive green corrugated iron roof and a veranda set on brick pillars—old for Nairobi or at least twenty-five years. Her luggage stood round her on the grass where the African driver had left it. There was a boy in the house, and sometimes she saw a small movement through a window, but probably this sort of arrival was beyond his experience and he did not come out, pretending he had not seen her. She sat there for twenty minutes, expecting each moment that her parents would arrive and settle the failure of her hopes.

Then, perhaps because they didn't come and she guessed that in spite of her mother's careful preparations she had mistaken the day, or perhaps because it was such a pretty house with its purple wisteria climbing the veranda and its brick steps down to this garden of trees and shaded green lawn, she knew that she had gained a reprieve. She went inside and made the boy fetch her luggage and found her pills in her night case. She had been due one an hour earlier which probably explained her depression.

That had been six months ago and since then she had lived here. She had bought food and given Mwengo orders about cooking it. She had taken a job and done it adequately. She had gardened a little and read some books. The long rains had come and gone. Recently she had joined several societies and begun to go to evening meetings. Now as she stood with the letter in her hand, at the moment when she realised it was from Tony, it seemed that these six months had been nothing, just some mechanical preliminary like the air flight from London, because it was now that her trial was to begin. She was not frightened, though it would need all her courage and strength. These she would give and for a moment before it began she felt a curious calm because there was nothing more she could offer.

## Chapter Two

EVEN now there was a moment of choice when she tried to decide deliberately and sensibly whether she should throw it away unread, as if it had been lost by the Kenya post as it might have been. Later she had no better idea what she should have done. She remained undecided from when she recognised the big writing which had never become a style but stayed an irregular scrawl, till she stood on the veranda where she had gone to be away from Mwengo laying supper, holding the single sheet of club writing paper. On this piece of small polite paper his scrawling seemed particularly out of place and the fifty words he had managed spread over the front and half the back.

"Dear Pony,

I am down here so why not come and see me. It's bloody. There's a big stiff who ought to have . . ." Here a line had been heavily scratched out so she couldn't read it. ". . . and pretty soon I'm going to do it for him. Well, let me know anyway.

T."

He had meant to change it but forgotten. Tony's letters, the ten or twelve she had had from him, had often given her the feeling that he didn't re-read them, their mistakes occasionally making them unintelligible—though not this time. It was as if other people could damn well find out what he meant. It was as if writing a letter was shameful enough and he could not bear the additional shame of examining what he had done.

It was like Tony to start at once with his own troubles, assuming that she was interested, saying nothing to welcome

her back or explain why for six months she had heard absolutely nothing from him. He didn't mention her short note from England telling him she was coming. Writing to her was as much weakness as he could bear to show and anything more apologetic would make him too ashamed. Probably he didn't feel apologetic.

Perhaps he had written it when drunk because only when drunk could he make himself. It made her wonder whether he had heard things, whether this strange abruptness was not because he had nothing to say but because the things he had to say were too complicated to trust to writing. She hoped so. However bad or stupid she would be able to bear them better than this blank wall of unimaginativeness.

Standing on the darkening veranda, the grey dusk settling quickly now on the trees in her garden, the first crickets singing, the traffic of the city a distant background sensation of noise, Mwengo behind her in the sitting room moving silently on bare feet so that she could only tell he was there by the occasional clink when a fork touched a glass, she again hesitated, but this time less to decide than to move away from herself while she still could, to see clearly what she had already decided. The night air was cool on her bare arms and she shivered.

She crossed the sitting room to her bedroom for a cardigan, seeing herself as she passed in the long wall-mirror. Sometimes she had no patience with her looks and managed to avoid them for a whole day, wearing little make-up except some lipstick put on abstractedly. Then she would feel sudden unexplained optimism and be sure again that she was pretty in a small dark way. She stood still now, uncertain whether the moment of change had come.

On the farm she had worn sweaters and trousers which showed her slimness so that if she wore a dress people had mentioned it. She had wanted always to be ready to climb into a saddle and gallop away, like some girl heroine of a pony book whose name she unexpectedly remembered had been Seraph<sup>h</sup>.

At that time she had been only a little sorry about the smallness of her breasts.

Since her illness she had worn skirts and blouses and sometimes summer dresses with short sleeves. Her skin was dark and there was fine black hair on her arms, the colour of the short black hair of her head. Sometimes it surprised her in a bitter way that her small round face showed so little of the distress she had subjected it to. Tonight she could only feel irritated by its childish immaturity.

Next morning she telegraphed Tony and bought an air ticket for Dar. There was no point in more delay.

### Chapter Three

It was a wonderful weekend, perhaps the last really wonderful time, that wasn't overshadowed by doubt and distrust. It was more than a weekend because she stayed till Wednesday, less and less willing to go, sensing that things might never be the same.

In the plane she had been afraid, wondering how almost four years would have changed him, knowing how completely she had changed. She realised with surprise that it would be the first time they had met away from the farm—except for occasional dances at Nakuru or Nairobi, but then the clubs had been like extensions of the farm, all their upcountry friends down for the evening to meet upcountry people from other farming areas, making it possible to ignore the few commercials or civil servants and carry on an extension of their upcountry life . . . Now that she was twenty-two Tony would be twenty-four.

She remembered the last time she had seen him, the morning they had driven away from their farm and she had looked up towards the Marlows' farm but had only seen the small white house standing alone on the hillside in the bright early sunlight as if it too might be deserted. She remembered being glad that he wasn't there to see them go because it had seemed already like a betrayal. And then he had been there, not by the house doorway or stables where she had looked but fifty yards away beside a group of thorns.

He had stood with his hands in his breeches pockets, she thought, though he was too far to be sure, a still, heavy figure, watching them leave.

She had an idea that this day which had been the beginning of the worst time of her life had been the beginning of Tony's

best time, and, wondering how she knew, remembered that there had of course been a later meeting, in Nairobi, a day which her memory had tried to blot out. Tony had come in uniform with some excuse for seeing her parents but really, she guessed, to see her. And she had known how he was enjoying himself. When they had been left together he had begun at once to talk about his own life, the mounted troop he was attached to, the way they had already cleared a certain area.

"We're beating them," he had said, and repeated it several times as if to reassure himself—but she had never doubted that he would beat them.

Presently she had seen him bring himself back from his adventures and notice her and know that he was wondering why he had come. And she had wished he would go away and leave her with her disgrace.

Later Tony had commanded a troop himself and been commended for bravery and given an award. She had heard these things from other people. During the fighting he had personally shot over twenty terrorists. Perhaps, if she had let herself think about it, she would have guessed that they hadn't all been shot in the fighting.

Sitting in the loud tube of the plane among the suited newspaper-reading businessmen, travelling high above the empty brown land of Africa which she could see between the wisps of cloud that passed smoothly below, she had had a sudden feeling of being surrounded by things she did not understand. She had guessed that Tony must feel this too, doing an office job in Dar-es-Salaam. And she had been afraid not only for the changes they might find in each other but for the unfamiliar life they were both leading, afraid that something in the way they had been brought up might have made them unfit for this impersonal world.

But as soon as the plane landed at Dar airport she felt only excited to be here and sure that all would be well. Perhaps it was this sense that Tony had always given and now that she

was near him she was already feeling, the sense, not that he would always be successful or able to manage his life let alone help with hers, but that he would never admit failure, which was surprisingly similar.

She couldn't see him yet but as she came through the dusk among the spread out passengers towards the customs entrance she knew he was there, one of the white figures on the balcony above. She couldn't see their faces but only the shape of their white shirts and shorts and white stockings as they stood, beer glasses in hand, looking down silently. Near the end was one who was large enough to be Tony but she didn't want to recognise him yet and looked ahead, trying to walk steadily and calmly, not easily able to for her excitement.

She was excited by the soft warm darkness, so different from the cool nights in Nairobi, excited to be at the coast again, already smelling the salt of the sea, and a scent of evening blossom which unexpectedly made her eyes fill with tears for the times she had come here as a child.

Then there was an unbearable wait in the crowded customs lobby while the cases were unloaded from the plane, the white shapes from the railing upstairs became dull ordinary people now with thin knees and ginger moustaches, standing in an undignified crush beyond the glass doors. At first she wanted to go on putting off the moment when she saw him, then, suddenly afraid that he might not have come, began to hunt wildly among them. For ten seconds they were strange faces before she found him, beyond the others, watching her, easy to see because he was tall enough to look over them. He had been watching her all the time, she thought. When she smiled he gave a small nod as if agreeing with some question she had asked, and went on watching her.

At last she was free and came through the glass doors into the crush of porters with piled baggage, husbands kissing wives, one hand round their necks, holding cases with the other, children hanging on and jumping up. Stepping over and among them she came into the open hall and stood opposite

Tony and they shook hands rather solemnly. Her small hand seemed engulfed by his great ginger one.

"Hallo," she said, and managed a poor smile. She didn't feel like smiling, wanted only to curl up and become nothing before this careful stare, his honest, almost colourless blue eyes.

"Hallo Pony, man."

She cried then, turning her face away so that he should not see, hearing in it everything she remembered and loved and hated about him, his determination to protect her and be gentle to her as long as he wasn't distracted by something more interesting, as long as she didn't argue or in some way make him feel small and stupid. Suddenly she was sure again how much Tony too needed protecting.

Now they were driving in his car which was old and open and had to be started with the handle, and he was telling her what a bargain it had been and how the dealers here were sharks, worse than Nairobi and that was saying something, but he had outwitted them, and she was half listening and half not listening but wanting him to go on talking and driving, not wanting the drive to end while she could be there beside him and hear his childlike confidence, which was really so unconfident.

They drove the eight miles from the airport, through the orderly forests of coconut palms planted by the Germans, his big shape beside and above her, his short hair blown by the wind where the windscreen didn't protect it, into the town which was empty in the evening, and when they came to the hotel she asked him to drive again. They went north, up the coast, past where the tarmac ended. It was silent here and Tony was quieter and she smelt the coast again, the warm saltiness of the air.

The coast to her was holidays from school. Each year they had come here, at first to a cottage north of Mombasa among palms where the sand was white. Then, when the beach houses began to be built, to a rocky inlet near the Tanganyika border.



She remembered the red sun coming up at dawn over the perfectly smooth red sea, and running with her father over the sand under the palms to the beach to see it. She remembered the time he had run into the sea in his pyjamas, pretending that he was going to fetch it and how she had been terrified that he meant to try. She had come back to the cottage calling out, "Daddy's been to fetch the sun but it's too deep." So she was told.

Everything about the coast was magical. To go down there from the farm which was over seven thousand feet had been like going to a new country. In spite of her love for the farm she had understood that there was something proper about a place like the coast under so hot a sun.

Its quietness. The fisherman walking slowly from one distant end of the beach across the front of their cottage to the opposite distant end, a tiny figure at last but still there long after you expected him to have disappeared, long after you could be sure whether he was still walking. The barrier reef, just below the horizon, a white line of breaking waves, roaring continuously so that you ceased to hear them. The heavy thud of the coconuts falling and the chant of the picker from the tree top, singing out the number. Best of all the bathing, the warm water holding her up. When Tony stopped the car at the end of a sand track with the white beach below and the dark sea spread out under the starlight only twenty yards away she sat forward quickly, wanting to run down to it with him, then kept still, feeling a sudden fear that something so perfect should happen so soon. In the silence without the car's engine she could hear the light hissing of the waves on the sand and could tell by the long quiet intervals how small they must be. Or was she afraid of what Tony might think she was suggesting? For perhaps a minute he sat still; then restarted the engine and backed down the track. She wanted to thank him for saying nothing, felt humiliated that she had not expected this.

They had dinner on the stone forecourt of the club, looking

down on the lights of the harbour. Only one other table was being used and it was quiet out here in the warm night under the stars. A large liner was anchored opposite, brightly lit from end to end and once or twice boats left it for the shore. Very faintly across the water she could hear dance music as if a door was sometimes opened to let it out, then closed. On the road which separated the club from the beach Africans occasionally passed, walking softly in the darkness under the acacia trees. She watched Tony, wondering what it was that had changed about him.

Not his looks, for he was still as big and fair as she remembered. Something, she thought. Perhaps the way he did not now always look her in the eyes when he spoke to her.

She asked about the farm and his brother.

"All right as far as I know."

It was while she was away that Tony's father had died and the farm had been left to his brother. She had guessed what a shock this might be to Tony and was sure now that she had been right. As the younger son he could have expected it to happen but it was something he might have forgotten to think about.

She asked about his job.

"Lousy."

She thought that might be all, then he told her more.

"The way they talk you'd think they were a bunch of clergymen."

He went on about it a long time.

"I know I'm not the brainiest chap on paper. Man, I can tell a deal that stinks."

She guessed that he was more worried about it than he was saying. She had the curious impression that in spite of the violent way he talked he was watching her almost anxiously, to make sure she understood how badly used and right he was. He hadn't talked like this on the farm, perhaps because it had been obvious there that he could shoot straightest, had the best polo handicap, was the strongest, bravest person in the district. It wasn't till near the end of the evening that she

realised that he wasn't going to ask a single question about what she was doing.

About England, yes; he had been there only once ten years ago and listened carefully while she told him about English people and English places and ideas, sifting automatically what he wanted to hear from what he didn't. Whenever they came close to her return and the things about Nairobi which she needed to tell him his interest went.

She thought it was embarrassment at the way he had failed to write to her, or a desire to avoid a subject which depressed him, but gradually began to believe that he did not need to ask. She first suspected this when he accidentally showed that he knew about her job. She became more and more sure that he had had some quite detailed report about her.

Later when he took her home and they stood on the pavement by the side door of the hotel, he bent and put his hands against her shoulders and kissed her quickly on the cheek. She wanted to thank him for that too.

She woke early but dawn was coming fast. It was the dawns at the coast she loved best, the sense, even in town, that they were there, warm and soft, waiting for her to run out to, no one else about.

Except a few Africans. She could hear some talking loudly as if in the early morning the town was theirs for an hour. From her window she watched two, passing on opposite sides of the road, carrying on a conversation of grunts and angry exclamations between long pauses. They waddled slowly and never looked back towards each other, perhaps because one carried a heavy wooden crate on his head and the other a very small raffia basket.

She dressed quickly and ran down the hotel steps into the road, and although things had changed by then and it was the second of looking out of her window and wanting to be there that had been perfect, she was still happy and excited.

There wasn't a car or a European in sight. She couldn't

see the sun yet but it must have risen behind the houses over the sea, for the sky to the east was blue. High up were a few white clouds but they weren't important in the great circle of perfectly clear blue. You didn't get dawns like this in Nairobi.

She liked the idea of all the Europeans in the town still getting themselves carefully out of bed. She had an accurate sense of how limp they must be feeling from their warm restless sleep, moving gently in their pyjamas and night-dresses round their bedrooms because even at dawn any exertion would make them sweat, presently sitting down to continue the cooler moments before the exhausting day.

Or perhaps because it was Sunday some of them would be still on their beds, under mosquito nets, waiting for their boys to bring orange juice. Tony too—she hesitated, wondering what made her expect Tony to be still in bed when at the farm he would have been up at dawn, riding in the hills above the house, even after a dance when she had sometimes slept late, shaved and out at six as if it had been a point of honour not to admit that anything so effeminate had weakened him. Perhaps it was because she could not imagine what he would do in the early morning in this town.

That day he took her fishing and this was the time she later remembered best, the time when they had seemed closest, perhaps the only time they had been close, though the happiness it had given her seemed to have spread itself over the whole visit.

In the late afternoon when the sun was lower but still dazzling on the blue sea they took the motor boat out among the islands beyond the harbour. She wore a wide straw hat from a tourist stall. She thought she wouldn't fish but sit quietly in the shade of her hat and watch. Tony wore no hat but a shirt which was too small so that his thick chestnut biceps completely filled its short sleeves and his broad chest with its sandy hairs spread its neck open to the bottom of the "v". But when she saw him in the stern, bent over a knot which he could not undo with his thick fingers while he steered the

boat with the tiller in his stomach, she wanted too much to help and pushed the hat under the seat and climbed down the tossing boat towards him.

He didn't look up. That was the best thing about Tony, when he was happy he would forget the silly politenesses he had learned which didn't suit him and treat you sensibly like a friend.

"Hold on," he said and moved away from the tiller so that she could kneel behind him and reach for it while he went on struggling with the knotted line. There was a choppy sea and the spray came over them as they crouched together in the stern and presently she was laughing with happiness at its cool wetness which made her gasp each time it hit her.

After an hour they gave up trolling, stopped the motor and lay adrift between the islands. Tony fished on one side with a short thick rod and heavy tackle baited with a big lump of fish flesh. She fished on the other with a hand line, sometimes looking down into the deep blue water where it disappeared below the boat, more often away towards the empty green islands. On the nearest she could see how the mangrove bushes grew down the beach and out into the sea. Far away, low over the water, the white buildings of Dar seemed unimportant. Perhaps it was the ease with which you could escape from people that made her happiest about coming back to Africa. There was Dar, capital of a country four—or was it eight times the size of England and here were these deserted islands. She could see sand between the bushes and it made her remember how new shoots stuck up from a patch like this, squashy, like a garden of rotten asparagus, and among them little muddy crab holes. Higher up would be hard white sand where another sort of crab lived which was colourless and blew away from you in a sweeping ark, as fast as dust so that you never felt sure of its shape. There was no sense on a beach like this that the next cove must hold a bungalow. At the time she had not known how much she had missed this peace which being away from people could give. Now when she

found it again she tried not to like it too much, understanding that it was a different Africa to which she had returned.

Without warning the boat tilted sharply and, turning she saw Tony leaning heavily against its side. His line was taut and he was straining to hold up his rod. Looking up to where its point should have been she was astonished to find it bent down near the water as if it must at any moment snap.

The boat tilted more steeply, the sea only a few inches from its gunwale. She began to climb towards the tiller, leaning out over her own side, reaching it at last and pushing it hard across. For ten seconds nothing changed and she held her breath, expecting at any second the boat to give a final tilt and the water flow in. Then very slowly they began to turn and a few seconds later were following, she steering, Tony in the bows, straining and cursing.

For five minutes they went like this, dipping and smacking the waves, towed steadily from below by whatever it was at the end of his line, then it was slack, so suddenly that Tony sat into the bottom of the boat.

"Hell," he said and for a second she thought he would stay angry and she would have to hide her laughter at him sitting there so foolishly on the duck boards, then he laughed too.

He reeled in the slack line to the heavy wire trace which had been bitten through. "Just as well," he said. "Man, it might have swallowed us."

## Chapter Four

IN the daytime while Tony was at work she walked in the streets of the town. It seemed completely different from the place she remembered as a schoolgirl so that she could not for certain recognise one view or building. Everything she saw excited her.

She liked the harbour with the black and white German buildings, now being pulled down to make room for concrete Colonial Office blocks. She liked the narrow streets of Asian shops, full of colourful things she wanted to buy, wondering why they seemed less drab than the same Asian shops in Nairobi. She even liked the cool white European houses which lay in a great suburban area of bougainvillea and acacia against the blue sweep of Oyster Bay.

Tony lived here, sharing a house with two men he called his nancy boys. How like Tony to consider it impossible that associating with them could implicate him. How like him, having discovered about homosexuals late in life, not to be prejudiced against them, making her sure that he wasn't naturally intolerant, did not go on inventing new intolerances to add to those he had learned as a child.

One morning she spent at the dhow port, a wooden jetty in a creek to the south of the town beyond the customs post, watching these short broad boats which crossed the Indian Ocean to Arabia lie alongside, their open holds full of earth and goats and fires for cooking so that they seemed like floating sections of a primitive village. Their sails and masts and even hulls gave an impression of being tied together by untidy bits of string and she was astonished that they could go so far.

Better even than the pretty sights of the town and the sense of being already half in an Arab world, she liked the freedom

she felt everywhere here, the self-respect of the Africans, so that they did not need to hate you, so that you could treat them and they could treat you as people.

She felt completely well for the first time since she had come home and thought of doing without her pills, though when the moment came to miss one the risk seemed too great.

In the afternoons when Tony finished work they bathed together, driving up the coast to run through palm trees down to empty sandy beaches. Tony had bought some goggles and a harpoon gun and was already skilful with them, more than she could ever be, and she asked him to teach her, just to watch him as he showed her. Also because it seemed almost the only thing he liked about his life here.

She wanted Tony to like things and be enthusiastic as he naturally was, having an idea that in a world which he understood so little, he might come always to dislike and despise, because it was the only way he could bear his failures.

Later they had dinner together at the Palm Beach, which he called "the only decent dump".

She was uneasy that he still asked nothing about her life in Nairobi. Several more times he talked angrily about his own job. He would leave tomorrow if he wasn't temporarily out of funds. Set up an import business of his own. It was easy money. All you needed were three good lines, then you sat back and took your thirty-three and a third. They were coining money, these bastards he worked for. Not down here, of course: he wouldn't stand a chance. Here they were thick as thieves—and thieves was the word.

For a day she felt she must tell him about herself, even though he did not ask, and waited for a chance, but when it came hesitated and let it pass. Then she did not want to tell him and worried less. She began to believe that in his inarticulate but often wise way Tony had arranged some truce which she must not upset.

She felt certain of this when they met on Tuesday at the New Africa for a lunch drink. She had been reading *The Races of Africa*,



and, when she saw him, put it on the seat of the next chair but he came past and lifted it. She waited, not able to look at him, for the thoughtless comment, hoping but not sure that she could laugh at it and make him smile too. But he said nothing, just put it back and called the boy for drinks.

On her last evening they sat again on the raised stone forecourt of the club, set out with empty tables, under the two Chinese lanterns, looking down through the darkness and the acacias to the lights of the harbour. Sometimes it hadn't been fun. When he had said stupid things about Kenya she had wondered whether it hadn't been all a mistake, two children put together by accident, each with elder brothers, coming to understand each other but really too different. Perhaps it was silly to go on pretending they would choose each other when the choice was wider. She was especially worried by the way they did not quarrel now, as if they both realised how final it could be. On the farm they had been able to shout and turn their backs one day, knowing that next morning there wouldn't be much they wanted to do except ride together.

But a moment later when his intolerance seemed only the stamping of a small boy who is angry because he is confused, she would know that she could still help him, might be the only person who could. And that this small boy might be the only person who could give her the courage she needed.

Presently she did not want to go on thinking, but only to sit here with Tony, looking down to the harbour, and keep on noticing the evening so that it would not go too soon. He was quiet tonight as if the necessary business of impressing her and reassuring himself was at last over, as if all these four days he had been making a strong noise in her direction. She liked him better now, so much better that she wished he would impulsively take her hand. But he sat quietly, one ginger haired hand holding the whisky glass, looking down to the black water and unmoving lights.

She thought he might be drunker than he expected. He had been drinking more than she remembered, gin at lunch and

whisky in the evenings, not beer which he had liked before. Tonight she had noticed him drink four whiskies before dinner, and wondered if he was giving himself courage to say something and hoped he would. Now, when she believed he had become too drunk, she thought this better.

They said goodbye that night because her plane went in office hours. They stood outside the hotel side door where they had stood on the first night.

"It's been so nice, Tony."

"Has it?" The idea seemed to surprise him and she wondered whether he had not realised how nice it had been because he had all the time been guilty about things he was thinking.

"You must come again," he said and frowned at some new idea.

"You ask me." It was an easy way to tell him to write which she had not dared to do, but she doubted if he would understand, was unsure that she wanted it, remembering his letters.

"Do you ever come to Nairobi?"

"You never know." He stared and she wondered whether he meant anything but later forgot it.

"Oh well," she said, and because he wouldn't touch or kiss her, lifted one of his heavy hands from his side and squeezed it quickly, then turned and hurried back through the hotel door, down the empty corridor to her room. Lying on her white hotel bed, her face in the pillow, she cried a little, not violently but with quiet sobs, then sat up and dried her eyes and read a chapter of *The Races of Africa*.

## Chapter Five

In the days after she came back to Nairobi she felt so changed that it was hard to remember her life before. When she looked back beyond her weekend away the person she had been seemed thin and pale, as hard to understand as someone else. What could she have been thinking when she had done this or that? How could she have let herself live in that pointless way? Though superficially she lived in the same way.

It was as if the routine events of her life had become purposeful, every one to be scored as a gain or loss in her struggle.

She set herself to read a chapter a day of the *Life of Lugard* and to learn two pages in her Kikuyu grammar. At the committees she went to several evenings a week she listened more keenly, sat more anxiously on the edge of her chair, made herself speak more often. Even at the office she tried not to give way to despair. As she half expected, Robinson did not mention her three extra days. Perhaps he had been on safari and not noticed. More likely he had noted it for use when her presence finally became intolerable.

Sometimes she could feel only astonished that Robinson, East African director of the MacRion Wild Life Preservation Trust, should steadily do so much to destroy what he was meant to preserve.

He was short and plump with narrow shoulders which he had never had to use except to prop himself off a desk, and a large belly; he had lived in Nairobi for twenty years, working for a bus company, a soft drinks manufacturer, a dry cleaning business and other firms. He had passed fairly quickly from firm to firm but remained a director of several. He was friendly

with all the Nairobi businessmen who addressed Chamber of Commerce meetings and whose speeches filled several columns of next day's *Standard*.

Heather had once heard him described as a middle sized fish in a middle sized puddle and the description stayed. He looked like a fish with his heavy horn glasses, the way before answering her he sometimes held his chin up and forward, turning his neck an inch or two each way inside his collar. He had a small chin which in this position barely projected beyond the line of flesh that joined his mouth to his middle neck.

Robinson's friends no doubt had helped him to get his present job. Sometimes when she saw him sitting pressed between his swivel chair and his laminated wood desk—the Trust's offices were expensively equipped with modern furniture—she wondered how he dared show so obviously that he was in the cosiest, least responsible job he had ever found and determined to stay there.

The Trust had money and many of the discussions she had with Robinson and letters she drafted for him were about ways to spend this. So far he had convinced the New York trustees that the moment was not right for spending any of it—except of course on their office and salaries. This he called "building up a basic organisation". He would write with enthusiasm about a new scheme, then gradually over the months show how his efforts to carry it out had been frustrated. Often he would frankly admit that in his first excitement he had underestimated difficulties. Sometimes she could not believe that Robinson was unaware of what he was doing.

At first she had been glad that her job should seem so frustrating, believing that it would help her to stop thinking about herself. Later she had wondered whether it was good for her to work against such a hopeless obstacle. In the days after she came back to Nairobi she did not understand how she had dared to lose hope.

She had heard of the Trust in England, its policy of finding and financing new arguments for saving wild life, not the old ones about preserving God's gifts for posterity, but anything which might be understood by the modern world. She had written to them from England, gone to see Robinson as soon as she came to Nairobi and, a little to her surprise, been offered a job. She could see now that the ease with which it had happened had been suspicious.

Sometimes she felt that nothing about it was real, that these people who worked here were only providing a background so that she could think her life real. It was a fancy she remembered having as a child, that she was the centre of some elaborate joke being practised on her, her whole world only a stage on which she was being subjected to some rather cruel test.

Quite soon she had seen how Robinson and his two research assistants resented her. She knew she should not criticise them, should not look at them with wonder when they came to work at nine and left at four for their golf and tennis, must hide how she despised them for refusing this chance which so few had to believe in their work. Perhaps she would have resigned if she had not known how this would relieve them.

Sometimes she believed they even feared her a bit. They thought her cold and efficient, typically unmarried and frustrated; and because she could see how to others these things might seem likely she could not easily laugh at them. Sometimes she felt she could not bear for another day the atmosphere of dislike she found each morning at the office.

Robinson was working on a scheme for farming Eland on the Tanganyika border. The idea had taken several steps backwards in the few days she had been away. The Game Department had officially withdrawn its support; the Meat Commission had written at length to explain why the calculations about marketing were unsound.

"You can see they don't like it. You can see they haven't tried to show it's possible."

"You may be right." Robinson took off his glasses and rubbed his eyes with his thick soft fingers.

"Why are they taking this attitude?"

Robinson shrugged his shoulders, but he probably knew.

He said, "Anyway, we must acknowledge their letter." He implied clearly that he did not want more advice and she should now do the job she was paid to do, answering routine correspondence. She was there to save him trouble and he was often genuinely indignant that instead she made more.

"Isn't that the way to make it final?" she said. "Shouldn't we get them to take it back, go and see them . . . ?"

But that was hopeless too and a wave of angry despair came over her when she remembered how Robinson returned from meetings with new failures, new chances to make a stand lost. She knew that his ineffectual presence often made it easier for commerce and destruction to get their way because they could feel no fear that the other side had not been represented. Robinson never seriously opposed the interests of his friends in the oil companies, government commissions, town councils; they were the people who, if by any misfortune the Trust folded, would get him his next job.

"They have to protect their clients," Robinson said.

"You don't," she said and went out, slamming the door.

She sat in her small square office, so small that she had to lean over the desk to pass behind it, breathing quickly with anger. She certainly wouldn't write the letter. She would force him to remind her and she would say she was sorry and still not write it. There were times when she was pleased to be Robinson's typist as well as assistant.

There were times when she could almost feel sorry about the embarrassing things she made Robinson do, disturbing the peaceful office he would have liked.

He had gone, without opening her door to say good night as he usually did. She sat staring at the horror photographs of poached animals on her office walls. One she could never see clearly but knew was Wanderobo climbing into the belly

of a dead elephant. Huge out of focus limbs filled the foreground and a small figure squatted in a dark centre cavity. Suddenly she could see that it was a row of squatting figures. She looked away at the hot sunny afternoon, the modern cars filling the streets in the crush to get out of town to garden bungalows, the ferro concrete office block which had grown another storey since she had been away. All day African labourers in tattered clothes crawled about it, wheeling barrows of concrete against the skyline, carrying planks, sometimes leaning out over the street without safety belts as they hammered on the next rise of scaffolding. Occasionally bearded Sikhs in white turbans took measurements and held plumb lines, but she had never seen a European; the effect was like an anthill which grew by itself. Presently her telephone rang and it was William.

She said, "I didn't know you were back." It sounded cold. She was surprised that she wasn't more pleased to hear him.

"I myself was not so certain of this," he said. "Now, however, I am quite certain, since your police have been interviewing me for three hours, all because I am back."

"Why did they do that?"

"They did not bother to inform me but I think they were looking for wicked papers. They have torn all my luggage to pieces but they have found nothing. To see their faces, it was quite sad."

"Have you told the Press?"

"I have said a little." He gave the tiny high giggle which sometimes escaped him when he was especially pleased with himself.

It would be headlines next day. She didn't know who to be more angry with, William Ndolo for his irresponsible childish excitement at this new trouble he had caused or the idiotic police for giving him such a chance.

"Are you busy?" he said. "I was thinking we would go somewhere. Just to celebrate."

"Tonight?" Again her reluctance surprised her. Another time she would have been flattered by the invitation which had only happened twice since she had come back. Perhaps it was his tone which assumed that she would accept that made her annoyed, and a little afraid.

"I have some work . . ." she began, then she knew that she must not allow this obscure fear to influence her.

" . . . but it doesn't matter "

"I will call at your house at seven o'clock."



## Chapter Six

SHE wore her white cotton dress with the upright pattern of small green leaves. When she stood in front of her long mirror she saw how brown her arms seemed against this white dress. She noticed the way her skin wrinkled on the top of her shoulders when she lifted her arm to pat her short dark hair, not deep wrinkles but a lot of small lines round a small hollow. She wondered whether tonight she should wear this dress which showed so much of her arms and shoulders, then was angry that she should be thinking tonight so important and went quickly into the sitting room but it was only quarter to seven.

She stood on her veranda. The garden was dark now, sloping into the tree filled valley but above the trees she could see the yellow glow of the city in the sky. From here, looking left along the veranda she would see his car lights as he turned into her drive. Then she was cold and sat inside the veranda door with a book on her lap but she wasn't understanding what she read. It had been a year ago, when she was in England that Henry Burch had written to tell her that a young Kikuyu, William Ndolo, was coming to Reading for a course on parliamentary democracy.

She had been past the worst of her illness then, reading and working for her return, still not daring to believe that she would be strong enough. By then she had known that she could not bear for the rest of her life to have run away and that only understanding what she had run from could give her the courage to go back, because understanding was the end of fear. Henry Burch had written, "In about five years William may be a great man, but more likely he'll still be a spoiled boy. And then he'll be a disappointed small boy which won't be nice. Anyway, see what you can do."

It sometimes surprised her that she had only met Henry Burch five or six times before she left Africa and these when she had been sinking into a despair and misery from which she never expected to escape, during the months after the farm when she had lived with her parents in Nairobi. Her parents had tried to distract her, making her lead a social life, taking her to parties, watching her continuously, telling themselves that they were sure she was better, unable to understand or really believe in her illness—till that night when they had come to her room and she had seen them moving round her in evening dress, hazy anxious figures, and wanted to laugh for the first time for weeks only she was being so terribly sick. Then everything had been reversed and it was they who were afraid, a little resentful that she should have done this to them, but she had felt only relief because whether she lived or not nothing would ever be the same; because the unbearable guilt of the past months had been consumed or made final—there wasn't much difference—in this wicked thing she had done which neither she nor they could ever deny . . . It was at a party with her parents that she had met Henry Burch. He had had his beard then.

It had been a bad year for him to come to Kenya, to teach at an African school, his head filled with political theory, a bitter middle-aged undergraduate. Even before she met him she had heard him talked about by her parents and their friends with indignation. How had he been allowed into the country, at such a time, an obvious communist?

And when she had first seen him, a small frail man of forty with a beard which, although it wasn't new, looked more like a growth than a complete object, she had felt a shudder of repulsion for someone so weak and obviously dirty. Then, perhaps because she recognised her parents' opinions in her instinctive intolerance, or because she had so despised herself that she wanted to be seen with someone so despised she had crossed to talk to him.

He had become the only friend she had, not a real friend but

someone she looked for hopefully at parties and once had coffee with in town—on a bad morning she did not like to remember. It had ended in nothing as she had known all her life would end in nothing except futile pain for others. But soon after she arrived in England Henry had written to her.

She had answered saying he should save his time but he had written again, ignoring hers, and presently there hadn't seemed much to do but accept the fact that he was going to write to her. He had written regularly, cynical letters of exaggeration about his life in Nairobi which she only half believed but had come to enjoy. More than anything else his letters had given her the courage to recover and come back. He had made it obvious that he never considered anything else possible.

Perhaps the thing she had liked best was the way he had never questioned that she must be politically liberal. It was as if he had judged her intelligent and so there was no further question. She had found this funny at first but had known that it was a compliment. Although it meant that Henry had never understood the great struggle she had had with herself it had given her courage for this struggle, shown her that it was possible to emerge on the other side and remain a person. When Henry's letter about William Ndolo came she was beyond the worst and with only a moment of fear had been able to write and ask him to tea at her Aunt Lilly's house.

She saw now that this might have been a mistake, but at the time she had felt brave enough to make that sort of mistake. Or perhaps she had not realised what a mistake it was because it was easy to forget in England how oppressive other people's steady dislike could be in a small country. In England nothing had seemed so personal. People did not know so much about you and if they found out there were other people to know and like. Aunt Lilly had of course told her parents. She didn't blame her. It had probably made the most interesting letter for months. Aunt Lilly had probably also forgotten how much

these things could matter: perhaps in the end it had not mattered, but at the time of her return it had been a shock to find so much prepared hostility.

She remembered the tea party well, each of them sitting nervously on the edges of her aunt's chintz armchairs in the tall Victorian drawing room of her aunt's London house. She had made her use this room though she would have preferred her own small bed-sitting room. The presence of her aunt—in fact tactfully at a *matinée*—had filled the place, so that she had continuously expected to turn and find her standing among the gilt mirrors, gateleg tables and Japanese screens; and the unfairness of this had made her want to run to her room where she could give way to the angry tears which were close behind her eyes. But she had sat there, forcing herself to stay, knowing how vital it was that she should succeed this time to give her courage to try again, asking William in a choking voice polite questions about his course on parliamentary democracy at Reading.

And he had sat there, answering politely, the Crown Derby tea plate on the knees of his dark suit. She remembered the contrast between his big head and his tiny neatly suited knees kept together to make this platform for the plate but not a good one; and the care he was taking not to drop or tilt it so that, astonishingly, she had seen that his hand was shaking. People said that William had been on his best behaviour in England and she knew what they meant.

But of course he had been laughing at her from the start, not understanding why this settler's daughter should have asked him, only certain that it was his victory. He had assured her that democracy was not a difficult conception for an African. He had given her an accurate summary of its meaning which sounded only a little like the paraphrase of a text book it presumably was.

Presently in desperation, because she felt she must make him believe she was a person, not a political phrase, she had told him her new liberal opinions. Except in letters to Henry

Burch it was the first time she had made such a confession but he had not seemed impressed.

At the end she had shaken hands with him, which in the confusion of the room's many little tables and chairs she had avoided at the start. His hand had been soft and he had held hers gently. She hoped he had not seen the shiver she could not control as she touched the soft pink palm of his black hand.

The tea had led to other teas, at cafés and cheap restaurants. It had seemed presently that he rang her whenever he came to London. She had been surprised that he found time between the conferences and Press interviews which were already beginning to occupy him. She had understood what Henry Burch meant by a spoiled boy and had believed she could help him.

More than this she had come to enjoy being with him, which was a relief after the smart young men her aunt had sometimes arranged for her. The long arguments they had had across plastic table tops among circles of pale tea, about limited franchise and land reform and birth control had been such a change from the smart small talk, which she would always associate with her first bad year in England, had seemed to belong to a real world, to the time which was now coming when she was going back to this world.

Two or three afternoons they had gone to the cinema. He was excited by films which seemed to give him ideas that were on the scale of his ambition; she had seen how ambitious he was and had believed she could help him with this too. It was when his course had ended and he had gone back to Kenya that she had begun to feel impatient with her life in London as if her time of preparation was over.

It was close to eight when he came but she didn't mind. She had finished with that way of creating offence, understanding how irrelevant it would seem to him, so that she wasn't surprised when he didn't apologise.

"Hallo, Heather."

C.P.T., she had once heard it called, standing for Coloured

People's Time, and thought this funny and put it in a letter to Tony but there had been no answer. Amusement was weakness, dangerously close to tolerance . . . "Would you like a drink?"

"Just a beer." He stood with it, not bothering to smile, watching her in an appraising way as if this was his right. Once she might have taken his silence for shyness but she knew now how arrogant it was, the assumption that he could wait to be amused.

"That is a pretty dress."

"I think so," she said.

"But you must allow me to tell you."

She turned to move glasses on the sideboard, too angry and humiliated to know how to answer this new way of talking to her. It was a minute before she could think calmly that she would have felt pleased if Tony had said it.

Tonight he was more than usually swollen with importance and she guessed that for the four hours since he telephoned he had been the centre of attention, the most wanted, interesting person in Kenya. Once she might have been astonished that he should have even remembered to come but she knew now that it was a further vanity to turn his back on all this and do something entirely to please himself. Even so, as they drove fast down the airport road, she noticed something unusual in the way he glanced at the cars they overtook, as if he half expected them to have recognised his headlights and see their faces turned as he passed.

It was a quiet night at the airport, the restaurant almost empty, and she thought this too disappointed him. She wondered why he had brought her here—except that it was still the only restaurant where they could go together. Also he might have wanted to take her to the scene of his afternoon success. As they came from the waving base, into the bare room of pale panelling and airline posters she felt instinctive relief at the empty tables—then was ashamed that she should care. She would have liked to walk boldly into a full room and see them all stare because it was they who should be ashamed.

They sat near the tall glass sheet which faced one side of the restaurant, looking down on the grey tarmac lit a weak yellow, where two four-engined planes stood but no one near them. Beyond were the red lights of the runway, beyond again low on the skyline the Mua Hills, though it was too dark to be sure. The stars above were bright and hard like the bright stars of all the nights in Kenya she remembered.

"They will not get away with it," he said.

"You're going to let it make a difference? Just because a brainless policeman . . ."

"It is possible."

"Don't you value people's respect?"

"They will respect me as long as I make them," he said. "For all their high talk your policemen, your politicians are not different from other men. They do not respect weakness." He sat away from the table, both small arms on it, giving her the feeling he often gave that talking to a single person was too wasteful for him to enjoy it much. "It is time we are starting some trouble, as you call it. We have been so good they are thinking we are soft."

"Shouldn't you wait for a proper grievance?" she said. "It's so childish," but she was worried by the way he was staring at her, guessing he might no longer be willing to listen to such frank things and she might be destroying her chance of ever talking to him.

"Have we no proper grievance? Was not our land taken from us? Are we not forbidden our independence, put in prison for political acts, still governed by imperialists?"

"And Mr. Ndolo's suitcase has been searched."

"That is right." For a second she thought he had honestly failed to notice the difference. He went on staring at her, his big head and discoloured yellow eyes. It wasn't any of the typical Kikuyu faces. She was irritated by the way he was trying to stare her out, refused to be drawn into this schoolboy game and looked down—at once she was surprised again by the smallness of his body, as if she had failed to realise how

close his face was and it was this which put it out of proportion.

"You must understand, Heather, that we have the whip as well as the carrot. Our people have not infinite patience as your politicians believe."

There was more sense in this and she wanted him to go on.

"Today I am the one they love, the one who can a little sway them. Tomorrow it will be another, who perhaps offers more things, more quickly."

He didn't think so. She had heard him say it before but tonight all sincerity had gone from it. He repeated it like a lesson in modesty, which he still knew but had begun to despise

As they went out past the restaurant bar there were two men in blazers drinking beer.

"Hallo there," William said.

They didn't answer, one who was clean shaven turning to stare coolly at William then herself, the other with a moustache looking away into the mirror of the bar as if he hadn't heard.

On the waving base she said, "Who were they?"

"Friends of mine. We have met already today but they have short memories."

"Special Branch?"

"That is right. Now they will hurry home to start a file on you too."

"I've got one." But she hadn't been sure.

They drove back the eight dark miles to the city, across the Athi Plain with the lights of the industrial area to the right. In that direction too were the crowded African locations. Ahead was the city centre with its skyscrapers, hidden in the darkness. To the left the nearest of the European houses showed a few lights among their shrubs and trees. These would be on Lower Hill Road, many of them the corrugated iron bungalows on brick piles built for Railway staff fifty years ago when they were the only white men here and all around the plains still thick with the unshot game.

Closer on the left they passed the lights of the new Asian



housing area; by day its pastel washed concrete seemed already dirty, like a slum, as if they had quickly and intentionally reduced it to this because they could not otherwise feel it was their home. William drove fast as he always did; revving the noisy engine of his D K.W. and she tried not to think of the Zebra and Wildebeeste which might cross, guessing that if she showed alarm he would drive faster.

She was excited to be going to the Fig Tree Club which was often spoken about. They went up narrow stairs behind the Bazaar.

They came in at a high level, the music suddenly much louder, below and far away the white coated African band playing in a circle of bright light. They went downstairs towards the dark floor, and gradually, below the smoke she could see that it was filled with crowded tables.

They were so crowded that people who faced one sat beside or beyond people facing the next. Each table top was filled with a great number of glasses, more than it seemed possible even all these people could be using. Among the tables African waiters in fezes carried trays, often stopped for a minute when a small movement of chairs blocked them, looking sideways and back for a way out, their faces shining and wet. At the centre a small tight body of dancers circled, curiously unimportant compared to the thickly filled darkness or the bright band.

The music excited her in a way no European dance music did. They seemed unable to keep out of it and their eyes were bright. Sometimes for thirty seconds the drummer alone played and the first time this happened she was unprepared and shivered with excitement.

They paused at the foot of the steps, nowhere obvious to sit, then someone was shouting near a far wall and they moved forward among the chairs. Presently she could see the table they were going towards, ten or twelve Africans round it in a neat circle.

As she and William came close they stood and began to shake her hand, bowing and laughing and asking her to sit

between them. Behind her they went on shaking William's hand, one holding and occasionally shaking it for at least a minute while they had a half serious half bantering conversation, others' because his hand was occupied grasping his shoulder or giving him hard slaps on the back. Two she noticed who must have come from opposite sides of the table were solemnly shaking each other's hands and introducing each other, then as if the ceremonial was too much for them slapping each other's shoulders and laughing.

She saw how they were enjoying this new game they had learned of being civilised people, childishly pleased by their success and the power it gave. It was dangerous, of course; but she believed the anger people felt for them was half jealousy of this spontaneous enthusiasm and life. They compared well with the exhausted European politicians she had met; or the pompous angry ones who seemed to find their anger so unenjoyable.

She danced with Itiro, a six-foot ape-faced African with long teeth and tufts of black beard on his chin, then with William. William danced well, almost professionally as far as it was possible in the tight crush. She didn't find it difficult. Tonight the things girls at school had said about never being able to make themselves dance with an African seemed too childish to remember, not real opinions but reflections of their parents'.

Dancing between the large cardboard pillars, crudely painted with fig trees in maroon distemper, she felt surrounded by an expanse of upturned faces in the darkness. Many of them were young soldiers and their too few girls. These were mostly Seychelloise, showing brown arms and shoulders, some thin and sophisticated, with sparkling glasses, plucked eyebrows and mauve lipstick, others enormous and fleshy. One she noticed was unbelievably simple and pretty, wearing no ornaments but a gold chain round the waist of her narrow black dress.

There were tables of brown-suited Asian men too, and a few

European girls. One, dancing with a young Italian with half inch hair, seemed young and pleasant in a bottle-shouldered English way. They danced close, holding hands, their arms straight at their sides, her head on his shoulder. Heather envied their uncomplicated love. No doubt it wasn't, but for a moment she wanted to think so.

She felt that this was the first truly multi-racial place she had found in Kenya, where people of all races mixed because they wanted to. It made the clubs and citizenship colleges, the evening classes and welfare societies she had taken such trouble to find and support seem false. People came here because they needed each other, not from some intellectual conviction, to work out some personal guilt. She was worried by her part in these other acts of patronage.

## Chapter Seven

IN the quiet early morning there was sun on her veranda and it made her happy. It made her sure that this was her country, as if she had lived the years in England under grey skies in a continual trance, groping about, her eyes down. She liked it best in the early morning, the sun sloping into her veranda.

She remembered early mornings on the farm when it had shone in the grass, her parents still asleep, and she had run down to it, stretching out her arms in gratefulness for life; and the dew had numbed her bare feet and she had loved it, almost loved herself at that time, been frightened by her happiness that God might notice its conceit . . . Perhaps he had. Perhaps her childhood had given her too much to love so that later things had seemed to lack light.

At three he had driven her home through the dark city, the night watchmen in heavy overcoats with thick sticks moving in the shadows of the shop fronts. They had sat in his car in her drive and she had tried to continue the discussion, as they sometimes had, seeing clearly that he wanted the population to grow so that he would have more to rule; but some of the excitement had gone, away from the dark club, the ugly faces of teeth and gums, needing to speak. "Our people, our country . . .", soon becoming confused, as if the long words they had learned took charge of their sentences and mischievously protracted them, till William told them what they meant. Now he had not seemed to want to answer her and she had climbed out and stood by the car door.

"Goodbye, William. It has been fun."

"Goodbye, Heather."

They had shaken hands through the car window, William still in the driver's seat. He had made no other attempt to touch

her. This morning she was grateful for this chance she was being given to help someone who mattered, only a little worried to remember the way she had wanted to get quickly out of his car.

Then, in a way she had sometimes noticed when she was tired, her optimism collapsed and she was nervous, most nervous to think of lunch with her parents. Each weekend she went to lunch at their new house at Karen.

At once she sensed their hostility, the way her father watched her as he came to kiss her.

"Hallo Heather."

The way her mother, sitting on the sofa edge, watched her all the time her father was moving and kissing her, then put her head down to sew as if she hadn't.

"How are you, dear?"

"All right, Mother."

They left her answer hanging, as if it was interesting that she should say so, but not relevant to the real answer. They went on watching her to find that out.

She wanted to defend herself by questioning them—then couldn't bear to ask about their lives. "Those are nice." She went quickly on to the sunny veranda to look at the flowers in her mother's garden. They stayed in the sitting room, noticing how oddly she was behaving.

She was most unhappy for her father, for the weakness which had brought him to this suburb. It had shocked her to find his hair white at fifty-five, though still thick, as if he had made himself old on purpose. She did not like to think how he filled his days out here, with nothing to hope for.

If only he had been obstinate and heroic, gone on with his farm after the attack, or bought another at the end of the Emergency. Financially he could have done it. Perhaps he hadn't the energy to make the great effort he had made a second time. Probably he wasn't going to risk so much again, not where he had lost so badly. Lately she had felt he wasn't ever going to risk anything again.

Her father had cried that morning, when he had seen how they had slashed the legs of his cattle. And she had cried with him to see him turned into a small boy whose hopes are destroyed. Several of the Africans who had done it had worked for him for twenty-four years, ever since he had bought the farm in 1929. It had been a bad year to settle, just before the depression and the locusts. It hadn't surprised her to discover that her father had settled in a bad year.

That morning she had heard the shots as they destroyed the cattle. It had been a heavy sunless day, the valley filled with clouds at many different levels, moving steadily up from the coast. Men from other farms had come to help her father shoot his cattle.

They had been much angrier than her father, carrying loaded guns, angry that they could not yet fire in revenge, almost pleased to be able to shoot even the cattle. They could still be angry because they were still afraid. For her father there had been no point. Sometimes there had been single shots and sometimes two close together. The echoes had come back, loudly and immediately from the forest above the house, then more distantly from a spur of hills below.

Even that morning when she had cried it had been half with anger that they had not told her such a thing could happen

None of them, not even her brother, had understood that it wasn't the Africans she hated for what had happened but her parents for bringing her up in this fools' paradise. It had made the comforting things they had said when she was ill irrelevant, and made it impossible for her to explain to them.

Perhaps least her brother Charles, and as she sat with her parents at their polished dining room table, eating the tender Molo lamb, served with three vegetables by their Kamba boys in white Kanzus, she was glad he hadn't come. She didn't think today she would have been able to stand his reasonableness which was really just a gloss on the surface of her parents' prejudices. Her brother Charles was a farmer now, working on a company coffee estate at Kiambu. Last time she had visited

him he had said, "Sorry, Heather, no whippings arranged for today."

After lunch she walked with her father in the garden, leaving her mother with the coffee in the sitting room. She wondered whether this had been planned and her father was now to have some serious talk with her. She hoped he would, feeling that it would be better than this cottonwool criticism which she could sense and never fight. But they only walked quietly in the shade of the wild olives, between banks of her mother's lavender.

When her father said, "There's nothing you want?" she thought he was beginning, then understood that, far from the start of some warning he had been sent to give, this was a question he had thought of himself, realising that something was wrong between them, unable to understand what. He was surprised when she took his hand.

"Nothing, thanks."

She turned him away from the house and they walked again under the trees, further this time, towards the edge of the forest which filled the valley beyond their garden, watching the sunlight and clouds which changed continually on the points of the Ngong Hills. She didn't want to go back yet to her mother—who sat in this house all day, quietly waiting for her daughter to come home to her.

It was her calm assurance that she feared, reducing her gestures of independence to futility. If her daughter wanted a house of her own she must be allowed one, not just for the time being but for as long as she was brave enough to stay there. Everything would come right in the end.

The continual reminder of what she must not do made it harder and harder not to do it. Its passiveness made her desperate because there was nothing to be angry with, nothing her mother would not have honestly denied.

Sitting on the edge of the sofa, tall and gaunt now, doing something in her lap but not really concerned with it, her knees turned sideways, that was how she thought of her. Alert

but relaxed, with none of the things to occupy her mind that there had been on the farm, just the health of her daughter.

Later in the afternoon Heather rested, unable to sleep, though she was now exhausted from her short night, too angry at the way she had been manoeuvred into it. She refused tea, left at four-thirty and drove down the Karen Road, the sun already falling behind her over the Ngong Hills. At the race-course entrance the line of Kikuyu women with shaved heads squatted on the grass verge selling sticks of sugar cane. The fast polished cars wheeled past, ignoring them. In the dip towards Mitchel Park, African syces were exercising polo ponies beside the stables. She wondered whether she should go on visiting her parents.

As soon as she came home the telephone rang, as if it had rung before while she was out. Standing beside the sofa in her neat bright sitting room, the two shelves of clean Penguins and Pelicans, the oatmeal curtains with geometrical designs in bright red, the jug of Sicilian pottery on the mantelpiece, she was worried that someone should ring her now, thinking she should know why but she didn't. She lifted the receiver.

"It's me."

"Tony?"

"That's right."

"Where are you?"

"Here. Nairobi."

"Oh, Tony." Before she could control or explain it a great relief came to her. It was as if for several days she had been growing more tense, holding her breath, and suddenly could let go, even laugh at herself because there had been no reason—though something still worried her.

"Are you on leave?" It would be like him not to warn her, giving himself room to change his mind.

"Not exactly."

"What then?"

"Various things."

She waited for him to explain but he didn't and she was more



worried, annoyed for stopping him with her question. Left to take his time he might have told her but now seemed to have nothing more to say.

After a pause he said, "Well, here I am."

She wanted to laugh at the conceit of it, but he didn't mean it that way

"I thought we might have a bite."

"Oh, Tony, I'd love to. The thing is I've got this meeting."

"Well, scrub it, man."

"I don't know if I can "

"What meeting's this?"

"A committee." But she didn't see why she should lie, resented his assumption that his return must be the most important thing in her life, more important than the other life she had been carefully making herself. It seemed essential, now that he had returned, that they should not start with lies which might grow and grow till they prevented all honesty. Already she half understood that the days at the coast had been a pretence, more like a part of her old life. "The St. Mary Club."

"For Christsake, man," he said, as if the name had broken some control he had planned to keep on himself. Perhaps he realised this for there was several seconds' pause, as if he was reimposing it.

"Can you come then?"

"Sorry Tony." She was sorry not to come and more sorry that he did not understand how he had made it impossible for her.

"Oh, well, some other time," he said and rang off.

## Chapter Eight

SHE had ordered supper before the meeting but when Mwengo came to lay it sent him away. After that she was oppressed to think of him standing in the kitchen, nothing to do except wait and see what happened next, wait for two hours if necessary. Why did they accept in this animal way what was done to them? She could see how it made people want to strike them . . . When she thought of him trying to stop her going to the meeting she cried a little that he should understand so little.

It was dark as she drove down the Highway, past the lines of fast moving headlights, going to Saturday night parties, dinner at the Muthaiga, the cinema, then the packed Equator Club. She was worried that she should be going in the other direction, as if they were alive but she was driving to some unreal back-water of life, to something shameful like a secret purge for a small collection of warped people who were spiritually unfit for the ordinary enjoyment of Saturday night. She wanted to turn the car and drive back to the world of people and laughter—she didn't even know his address.

Gradually they all came, seven or eight middle-aged ladies, an officer of the Salvation Army, a plain-clothes parson. They weren't punctual and several of the latest explained that they had been kept by the Child Welfare Committee. The others waited for them without complaint, content to postpone a little the pleasure ahead. Half an hour later Mr. Willmington began the meeting.

"May I take it, Ladies and Gentlemen, that that concludes the preliminaries . . . ?" He was short and bald with fat wrists, had won championships on seven of the city's nine golf courses.

The ladies tittered. Mr. Willmington was in form tonight. It was going to be a good meeting.

Tonight she saw more clearly how they were enjoying themselves, waiting for their turns to speak. It could not be often that they had an audience of eleven compelled to listen. It was the talking they liked and when something had to be done they often had reasons for not being the best people.

Except for one or two round faced women, who did not seem to notice the way everyone else disgracefully gave them the work. "Mrs. Johnson, after your splendid efforts last time it seems hard to call on you once again, but—you are so good at it . . ."

She wondered how they could be deceived by such perfunctory flattery, might have felt sorry for them if she hadn't known how badly they would do it.

She knew that if run by Mrs. Johnson and her friends it would remain a social gathering of prosperous commercial wives for patronising their servant women.

"Please don't think I'm criticising . . ." The ideas she had had at the Fig Tree were too fresh for her to keep quiet, though she heard herself with apprehension, knowing already that she had not fully calculated what could happen.

"It seemed to me as a newcomer that the atmosphere was a bit strained." She watched them stiffen. Someone was going to disturb the tea party tone. "I wondered if it was the best place."

They were badly shocked. Mrs. Verney's husband's firm's go-down, which he so generously lent . . .

"Please don't think I mean . . ." But the tears were in her eyes and she could say nothing more. They were embarrassed, but not too sorry.

"We're always ready for new ideas," Mr. Willmington said. "Perhaps, Miss Carew, you can suggest an alternative."

She could only shake her head. It was half a minute before she could speak and they stared at her, some anxiously like old

Mrs. Barton, some like Mrs. Pusey without hiding their indignation. She said, "Don't you see . . ." but it was a croak and she had to clear her throat and wait again, shivering now, her eyes down, her small clenched hand in front of her mouth.

"They may not be intelligent or literate—they know the difference between a go-down and a house. They know we don't entertain each other in go-downs. You can be sensitive to these things without being educated." Their faces were hard with dislike and she began to care less. "That's the mistake we're making. We aren't thinking how to help them but how to make ourselves look as if we're helping them."

The silence went on for five seconds.

Mr. Willmington said, "I take it, Miss Carew, that you are suggesting one of us should offer our house for the tea party."

"And see them drop cream buns all over the carpets," Mrs. Pusey said with a high hysterical laugh. She was a tall grey woman with the tiny jaw and mouth of a small girl below a great bald forehead.

"Well I don't mind," Mrs. Barton said.

"Oh, but Mrs. Barton . . ." They rose up in chorus to protect her from her own foolish goodness

"I've had worse than cream buns on my carpets. Matter of fact I hide 'em in a cupboard, then we can give the place a good swill down with Jeyes Fluid."

They knew what she meant. It was the children—who got behind the couches, were found squatting in corners. They said no more, letting her words argue conclusively against her. Mr. Willmington permitted himself a small relieved laugh. By mixing with ladies of good works on so many committees he had picked up many of their habits.

He was public relations officer to a large commercial firm and she had begun to know him well, but when he passed her in the street he would only nod, as if to prove that she was someone he only met on committees. He thought her a tiresome

neurotic, without enough to occupy her so that she made herself a nuisance to busy people like himself.

She had heard him stand with certain of his ladies at the end of a meeting, starting small nasty ideas about people who had gone, only a minute after he had been open and friendly to them. Sometimes he would let these things slip out during meetings and then be fulsomely apologetic, all the time laughing at his cleverness. She could imagine the things he would say about herself.

Glancing at the watch he wore on an expandable silver strap round his puffy wrist, she saw that the meeting had only lasted thirty-five minutes. Already she was shaking and exhausted, not much chance that she'd sleep tonight. All the new hope and determination she had come with had gone. She could not understand how she had felt hopeful.

The meeting discussed sandwiches, urns and trestle tables. She tried not to interfere, saving herself for what was vital. She noticed that the others did not make this distinction but discussed everything with the same solemn caution . . . She could imagine so clearly how angry he must be to have had his plan for the evening spoiled after he had come seven hundred miles, because of a silly meeting. Put like that it did seem silly and for a moment she found it difficult to remember why it had happened. She was surprised to hear the meeting reach the last item.

"Tonight, ladies and gentlemen, we must complete nominations for election to offices at our forthcoming A.G.M. So far we have no candidate for Vice-President. In view of what Miss Carew has implied about the need for new blood I should like to put her name forward."

There was a surprised silence. It seemed to Heather that Mr. Willmington might have only proposed her to obtain this effect. Then Mrs. Barton seconded her.

"Seconded by Mrs. Barton," Mr. Willmington said and wrote it down. She thought of saying at once that she would not stand. There were enough reasons: her illness, her newness

to Nairobi. Then she knew that she could not bear the way Mr. Willmington would look at her when, in spite of all she said, she too shirked real work.

A moment later she wanted the job. She guessed that he meant to keep her quiet with this unimportant position, and the idea pleased her. She would keep quiet till she got it, then she would show him his mistake. It seemed the first encouraging thing that had happened that day.

As soon as she had arrived at the meeting Heather had noticed this thin girl sitting by Mrs. Pusey, but Mrs. Pusey had not introduced her, nor to the others who had come later.

It was as if Mrs. Pusey was treating her as some sort of possession which she might display but which it would be immodest to draw attention to.

All through the meeting Heather had watched the girl. She could do this without embarrassing her because she was always looking down at the carpet.

Now, the meeting over, she stood quickly and after Major Bowles and Mrs. Johnson had passed in front of her towards the door, crossed to the girl.

"I don't think we've met. My name's Heather . . ."

Before she could finish Mrs. Pusey turned from Mr. Willmington and said quickly, "This is Lucy. She's going to help me with the sale of work, aren't you Lucy?"

"Yes," Lucy said, not looking at Mrs. Pusey but giving one shy glance at Heather. When she did it, looking up for the first time, Heather was more certain that she was pretty.

"That's good," Heather said. She treats her like an imbecile, she thought and wondered if she was. "We shall need you."

Mrs. Pusey didn't go on speaking to Mr. Willmington but stood listening, ready to intervene.

"Lucy's good with her fingers, aren't you Lucy?"

Lucy didn't answer but gave a shy smile, Heather thought, though her head was now so far forward that it was impossible to be sure.

## Chapter Nine

SHE was awake till three, then her pills worked and she remembered nothing till she sat up quickly at nine. Perhaps she had slept through his call. Perhaps it had woken her. She tried to remember but nothing came.

She felt heavy and drugged as she moved about the kitchen, wondered whether she had accidentally taken an overdose. It was Mwengo's day off and she was irritated that she could not find the coffee pot, then the milk saucepan. Perhaps it was part of their plan to undermine her confidence . . . but she stopped that.

Standing in the doorway she was sickened by her pretty, sterile sitting room. She wanted the books to lie on the tables and chairs as if they were used. They were used of course, then put tidily away. She wanted dirt and heavy earthy footmarks and soiled towels—she hated herself because she could not really want soiled towels.

Because it was Mwengo's day off she did not dare leave the house.

Once in the afternoon she found herself staring at the telephone on the bookshelf. "It's going to ring now. It's going to ring when I've counted ten, as I reach the word ten; one two three . . ." But she made herself hurry into the kitchen to wash a pair of pants. When she found the towel they had been wrapped in it was empty and she remembered that she had already washed them. She paused, listening quickly; by now she would have reached ten but the telephone didn't ring.

She went to the office on Monday. Robinson was on safari at Serengeti, and there was little to do except open his letters and imagine how he would answer them. His wife rang several times to ask if he was back; there was something strange about

this but too complicated to guess. Twice she explained to Heather that he often went direct to the office after safari, to make sure there were no fire-brigade calls, using exactly the same words, forgetting she had said it before. The idea of Robinson getting fire-brigade calls made Heather laugh, and wonder how he must describe his job to Mrs. Robinson. She could never remember Robinson doing anything except go straight home after safari, and once she had accidentally discovered that he had been there three days.

Sometimes as she sat at her desk in the small square office of cream distemper and frosted glass, with the poaching photographs of dead game, she thought it must be some bad dream that he should be here in this town and do nothing to see her. She could not believe that she had deserved such punishment. Somewhere he was getting up and going to bed, sometime in the day he was walking along the pavements she walked. She was so strongly aware of him that it hardly seemed possible she should never see him.

Perhaps he was only here for a few days. They were slipping by in this idiotic way, and there was nothing she could do except wait and hope that his vanity would be healed before it was too late. Sometimes she wished she could be told that he had gone, so that the strain of waiting could be over. Then it might be possible to look round and see how much of her life he had left.

As the days passed she found it harder to look in her mirror and see how her face was becoming small and lined as it had seemed during her illness, her skin grey. She began to use more make-up but because she was bad at this the effect was white and powdery, as if she had the scars of some accident to hide.

These were hot rainless days, the afternoons in the office oppressive, the sun shining on its outside wall so that, sitting four feet away, she could feel its radiated heat. There was no wind and though she opened her window wide there seemed no reason for the stale air inside to change places with the hot



dusty air outside. The grass in her garden turned brown and there were cracks in the red soil. When she drove fast into her drive a cloud of red dust drifted and settled on the flowers in her border.

That Wednesday the transport workers' strike began. She supposed there had been some warning, grievances which had not been met, negotiations which had failed. No doubt the daily paper had printed them in a corner, not to alarm its European readers, encouraging them to bury their heads deeper, so that they would be sad and pained when the explosion at last came.

She heard of it first from Robinson's assistants. No buses were running. The roads for miles round Nairobi were thick with Africans walking to work. The railway labour had camped outside the station, ten thousand of them sitting on the grass among the ornamental shrubs—well four thousand at least. They gave her an idea of what news must have been like before there were newspapers to establish the one rumour which everyone should repeat, with an easy mind because they no longer needed to assess the truth of the things they heard or be afraid that other people might have heard better things. In Kenya it often seemed that news was becoming more a matter of rumour, when so much was suppressed.

Driving home at four-thirty she had forgotten the strike and was surprised to find the traffic stopped ahead of her at the Whitehouse Road roundabout. Though she could edge forward no cars were passing and she guessed the jam would soon be complete.

She began to see the strikers, crowded thickly in the car park beside the Railway Building, pointing and talking, enjoying the excitement. She saw the blue police cars in the side streets, European police officers beside them in khaki jackets and shorts, resting their buttocks against the wings, as if they had been there a long time.

Opposite, under a gum tree, was an open lorry, its back full of African troops. It was the first time she had seen a riot

squad and she stared with fascination, wondering where they were normally kept. They didn't look British, with their brimless steel helmets and loose cotton trousers gathered at the ankles, more German. They carried small yellow tins of tear gas strapped to their belts.

Closer to the roundabout she saw that she had arrived at the moment when the strikers had decided to go. They had sat there all day but were now coming out in a dense crowd which filled the seventy yard wide station approach. She had never imagined that there were so many Africans in Nairobi.

She had never seen people looking so like scrambling ants. All those thousands of black legs moving as this great mass of them crawled together. At one place they had flowed over a small hedge and it was completely destroyed, the crushed branches spread for thirty yards under their bare feet.

They moved steadily in one direction, some waving pieces of paper. Every few moments they began a small rippling shout of "Uhuru", but it didn't last. When the car in front moved forward she hesitated then followed and came to the roundabout. She was completely stuck then, and unexpectedly a new wave of Africans from behind flowed down both sides of her car. For a second she wanted to shut the windows but would not let herself.

She had thought them jolly but not now. As they passed, a ceaseless flow of black faces, they stared but didn't smile. They were surprised to see her there, had been following, following, willing to do anything they were told. Suddenly they met something they had not been told about so they just stared, but she understood that it was with incomprehension, not respect.

To her left there was an African on a bicycle, passing the opposite way and they let him go, then he lost his balance and swayed among them. At once he was pushed off and there were angry shouts and his bicycle fell with a clatter. He tried to pull it away by its front wheel but they began to flow over it and he was forced gradually towards the crowd's edge. She

knew how precious a bicycle was to an African, often his only possession. They knew it too. She did not think any of them individually would have done this to another African's bicycle and understood how they had surrendered their identity naturally and completely to this new organism which was greater than themselves.

Because she could never have made this surrender she was suddenly doubtful about the things she wanted to help bring to Africa, democracy, self-respect, health, education. She suspected that they might not want these things but were practising on her and on all Europeans a great joke, the sort of joke they would enjoy, to get what they really wanted, a corrupt, violent, unfair but exciting and colourful country. A country of hate and love and ambition and betrayal, of real friendships and enmities, of happiness and cruelty. For a moment it seemed astonishing that people should hope they would want the monotonous painless life of Northern Europe. It suited the grey skies there. Here the sun was hot and the sky bright blue and the rain violent but the sun shone quickly again.

It wasn't till Thursday morning that he rang. He asked her to the Muthaiga dance. He asked her neither especially kindly nor especially rudely. He didn't mention his call on Saturday and nor did she. It was as if they each knew they were moving forward again now and to spend time or thought on what was past was a dangerous waste of energy.

## Chapter Ten

HE seemed to fill completely the open french window, his head near the top, his arms brushing its sides. His dinner jacket was tight across his shoulders and its sleeves short, showing several inches of white cuff filled by his ginger haired wrists. She guessed it must be borrowed. Staring down at her as she sat reading on her sofa, her legs curled under her long dress, the pose would anyway have been absurd; in the boy's size dinner jacket it made her laugh.

She didn't much like her hysterical laugh from the shock of seeing him there, the annoying shiver of excitement. This big stupid man—who hadn't two ideas to rub together, something her brother had once said . . .

They drove through empty suburban roads, under tall black hedges, every fifty yards a name board, a glimpse of grey stone bungalow between rows of *cabas*. She was surprised to realise that it was the same open car he had had in Dar.

"Did you drive all the way?"

"That's right."

It was like him to mention casually something which must have been a feat of endurance as well as mechanical foolhardiness. She had an idea that there were things he wasn't telling her, about breakdowns perhaps or how he had failed to sell it.

"Tony."

"Uhur."

"Sorry about Saturday. I wasn't expecting you. I had this committee." She hoped he wouldn't answer, could not think what she had expected to gain by defending herself. "Who's coming tonight? Are we a party?"

They reached a roundabout and cornered fast, forcing her outwards against the door.

He said, "What was it?"

"What was what?"

"This damned committee."

"Something I'm mixed up in."

"What does it do?"

"Good works," but why should he make her disparage it? "Tries to help civilise the African women."

"Some job," he said with a hard laugh.

She had wanted to tell him about the futile well-meaning committee, Willmington and his ladies. Sometimes during the week she had thought how it would make him angry for her. Now she did not want to tell him.

"Might be more use starting on the men."

"Unless you educate the women their children will never have a civilised home." But she was sorry he had drawn her into answering, depressed about the evening which was starting so badly. If he sulked now he might go on for hours. Now she should let him say something to make him pleased with himself; she didn't try, unable to feel enough sympathy with such male lack of self-control.

Already in the car park she could sense the excitement. Half a dozen cars with bright headlights nosed about, looking for space. All around car doors were opening, parties in dinner jackets and ground length evening dresses gathering themselves in the darkness, converging on the lighted entrance, the thin music beyond.

Into the corridor with the horns of dead buck, crowded now with grey haired ladies in twenty year old satin ball gowns, many of them with thin blotchy arms from too much sun, and suddenly she could not go on, kept still under the tapes of the letter board. Tony was at the desk, leaning heavily to sign the book, doing it with concentration.

"All fixed." When she didn't move he said, "Want the squats?"

"No, Tony."

He stood near her, put his arm behind her back. "They won't bite."

She was astonished that he came anywhere near understanding, looked up at him, smiling, her eyes wet but she wouldn't cry now and they went forward together into the crowded club room.

They filled every chair and sofa, making a loud gabbling noise, already as fierce as a successful sundowner, sometimes heightened by a violent male laugh but too often to cause interest. Sometimes a whole party burst into laughter as a story ended. Because the chairs were low they gave the impression of being spread evenly about the floor of the bright yellow room. Others surrounded the bar in a thick fringe, red in the face from talking above the noise.

Beyond, in the reading room, the sofas and chairs were full too, young men with whisky glasses sitting on the arms above pretty girls with thin bare shoulders and grey haired military parents. While Tony looked for their party she kept still in the doorway, not wanting to be recognised, waving once to a woman in green who frowned as if only half remembering her. Then they were stepping among black trouser legs and spread dresses.

She could hear them grow silent as she passed, feel their eyes on her, their astonishment that she should still dare to come here. She was hot in the face and close to tears again before they reached their party in a recess behind a pillar.

There was Charles, her brother, more aware than the others of the prejudiced things they were saying, now that she was coming near. It was his intelligence she would never get used to, often making her angry and disappointed. Next to him, Priscilla, his thin fair wife with wedding ring, ruby engagement ring and another of small diamonds and pearls, which Charles must have given her, in a cluster on one thin finger.

Beyond were Bill and Margery Stope, Charles' friends from the same estate. Sometimes she could not understand how

Charles could seem so satisfied with friends she knew he thought stupid.

Against the wall was Bertie Gaymer who had been in Tony's horse troop in the Emergency and was now in beer. He had brought Annabel, a long faced girl with big front teeth who wore a string of small pearls and a thin gold bracelet which didn't suit her big bones and large features but were probably real.

"Hallo Tony, hallo Heather." They were friendly but cautious. Because Tony had brought her they would suspend judgement and she was grateful, anxious only to sit where she would not be noticed and need not talk.

Behind this pillar she could watch without being watched and she began to sense the atmosphere she remembered when her parents had brought her here to dances, the determination to have a good time, to spend the money they had had no chance to spend for the last months on their farms.

She began to recognise people she had not seen for years, Chris Moreley who must be twenty-one but looked ten years older. His father had left his mother when he was sixteen and he had had to manage their farm. Even before she went away she had been told he was drinking a bottle of brandy a day. He had a beige drooping face which was thin yet had hanging pouches below his cheeks.

And there were the Sinclair twins, who farmed at nine thousand feet and had been taken to shoot their first elephants at twelve. They had red faces and low foreheads which sloped straight back to ginger hair. Their noses were sharp and triangular and their ears stuck out at ninety degrees to their heads. They mooched around among the drinkers, never staying long with their party, their shoulders hunched, glancing from under their ginger eyebrows, as if picking out the things which would need breaking later.

At dinner she sat between her brother and Bertie Gaymer. For a few minutes Bertie told her about beer and she had to answer, and wonder if he would soon ask her about herself

then the conversation was general and she need only listen. It was less a conversation than a continual squeal of gaiety, a little hysterical, but she was glad to laugh with them, feeling that they were gradually accepting her. Even Charles laid some little pellets of bread on the blade of his knife and by bumping its handle lobbed them towards Annabel's wine glass.

It was Annabel who was gayest and made them laugh continuously with stories of a timid vet, just out from England who had come to attend her horses. "My dear, when I said, it's got a rub on its withers he went round and began to examine its you-know-what . . ." One day he had come to give A.I. to a cow and asked her to leave the stall because it was rather embarrassing, but she'd kept an eye on him through a crack. He made such a muck of it she'd gone in and finished the job herself.

"You see dear, at home I had a little practice in Brighton and it was mostly cats. Cats and budgies." She repeated this three times, each time breaking into a new shout of laughter. Bertie Gaymer was delighted by her success. "Darling, tell 'em the one about Daisy foaling."

After that Bill Stope imitated the Governor. "'How many pineapples to the acre do yer say? Let me see now, how is it that yer give me quite a different figure from the one I was given at Fort Hall last week?' He keeps a little black notebook and writes it all down. 'How many active union members among yer labour? Let me see now, last time I visited this estate I was informed . . .'"

Once there was an unexpected pause in the gaiety, as if they had all run a long way and needed to recover their breath. They sat silent, except when Tony chuckled as he remembered Bill's Governor. Half turning to her, Charles said, "How goes it, Po?" quietly but loud enough for everyone to hear and wait for her answer.

As her elder brother he had always assumed a right to ask about her life. She thought of pretending he meant her wing of roast duck. She wanted to ask him about his life. Are you



still in love with Priscilla. He would have been offended. He had drawn attention to her silence, just when she thought she was successfully becoming part of this friendly evening. But she believed he meant to be kind.

"Enjoying the job?"

"Not particularly."

He raised his fair eyebrows. He had suggested something more open-air. looking after the horses of some rich coffee farmer, reminding her of how he had patronised her as a child, arranging her life.

She was often unhappy that he was so unlike her, content to work for some impersonal company, where the most exciting thing he could hope for was a little promotion, a change to a sizal estate or to the administrative staff. More children, no doubt, the first two had come fast enough.

Sometimes she believed he was retreating from all thought or emotion because they were too painful, or too pointless and ultimately conceited. It was this that made her most angry. A farm of his own she could have believed he felt strongly about, hope and ambition, even greed. Sometimes she wished that his marriage had not been so easy and apparently happy. He seemed satisfied with his achievements and she wished she could agree.

His marriage to Priscilla had destroyed any small understanding they had had. She had been his only real girl and they had been married two months after they had met. It seemed unfair that such a chance should succeed. Sometimes she caught herself watching Charles for boredom. Even when they had been most obviously in love she had not been able to think what they talked about.

The conversation began again and Tony told stories about the business methods of Asians in Dar.

"Man, they'll lose money on a deal if they get excited. They'll explain it away of course. Your goodwill is more valuable. It's not true, man. They enjoy the bargaining so much they're carried away."

She thought he might be preparing the way for some confession, perhaps about how he had been swindled over his car.

"They live on a handful of rice of course."

Coffee and brandy in the ballroom, ten-thirty now, the dance beginning, though only a dozen couples on the floor. The band played limp tunes and she could not help comparing them to the hard, exciting music at the Fig Tree.

Gradually more parties came, each bringing their own laughter into this larger room which needed so much more to fill it. In half an hour all the tables were taken and as soon as each new number began the floor filled with a tight revolving mass, not so tight as the small dancing body at the Fig Tree, but because it completely filled this big ballroom floor giving a sense of tremendous power, a great rectangular block of working humanity. Mostly she danced with Tony.

Tony danced well, in spite of his size and weight, as if he did not mind showing such a feminine characteristic because it was expected of a man. She had always liked dancing with Tony, even when they had been twelve and fourteen. It had begun when they were made to do it and had giggled together about how stupid it was. Or about how they did it with a fine exaggeration, kicking up their heels till they had to stop for laughing. She had laughed and giggled with Tony to help him with his embarrassment.

Near midnight they went together to drink at the bar. Out here two young men were lying on the floor, then trying to stand with glasses of whisky balanced on their foreheads. A short freckled man was explaining it to a group watching. "If they win they drink the whisky. If they lose they pay for the next round." On the floor where they lay, then rose and staggered, there was a lot of broken glass and spilt whisky and their starched dress shirts were sodden.

"Sometimes I forget you've been away, Pony, man."

She held his hand and squeezed it quickly. "Me too, Tony." She wished it could be true.

"Are you here for good?" She tried to ask him casually not to let him know how she cared about the answer.

Tony nodded.

"Why's that?"

His silence made her more suspicious.

"You haven't come back for me?"

He shook his head, but she thought the direct question might have been a surprise and he hadn't been ready with an explanation.

"Couldn't go on working for that bloody set-up, man."

"You resigned?"

After a pause he said, "Mutual consent." He gave a quick grin. This was when she liked him best, when suddenly the barriers he built round himself of defensive pride went and for a second he showed how modest he could be. Modest about his intelligence. It made her remember how he had once asked what a chap like him was to do with no brains. He wasn't modest about his strength or courage. He wasn't conceited either. He just knew.

"It hadn't any prospects."

"It was a job."

"I'll find a better one up here."

She watched him carefully, trying to guess why he had done it, but she was wrong to expect any simple reason.

Bacon and eggs were being served when they came back. At one end of the ballroom there was a prolonged scuffle while six young men carried another to the window and dropped him kicking on to the grass outside. Squatting in the middle of the empty dance floor a red faced man was performing as a snake charmer before a large copper pot, a maroon cummerbund round his head, a cigar as pipe. His friend writhed in front of him, a pansy snake. Unexpectedly the two of them began a swift run up the room passing the copper pot as a rugby ball, swerving to avoid the African boys with the bacon and egg plates, scoring at last below a table among the folds of an enormous pleated ball gown. At a table close to their

own they were putting ice cubes down each others' necks and a handful clattered and slithered on to their own table. Bertie Gaymer was talking about the strike.

"It's a demonstration of force, a test mobilisation. The boys'll come out and review the troops, then send them back to work."

She felt the pressure of them expecting her to answer.

"They're a lot of vicious thugs."

But these were things he often said when something annoyed him, a reaction needing no fresh thought. He wasn't doing it deliberately for her, had forgotten there was anyone who might disagree. The others hadn't.

"Why should they give us this warning?" Charles said. He tried to make it a less passionate discussion and she was grateful.

"I've talked to the railway people," Bertie said. "They were taken completely by surprise. The bastards felt like a strike so they had one. Not a thought for the good of the country. It took them till mid-afternoon to decide what they were striking about. Do you know what one of their demands was? Same leave as European staff, including long leave in the U.K."

The others listened, agreeing of course, but sorry that Bertie should talk about it, as if tonight they would have preferred to avoid ideas which made them angry and despairing all day, pretending it was still ten years ago.

"Paid U.K. leave!" Bertie said. "Can you believe it?"

"Of course not," she said.

He stared, as if seeing her for the first time. "What's that?" He honestly thought he'd misheard.

"I don't believe it." She was excited to have shocked him so successfully, to see him turning red with drunken anger, forced to control his instinct to threaten her because she wasn't a man. But she wouldn't argue and turned quickly away to ask for water.

"Are you saying I invented it?"

At once she was depressed and frightened, saw that he would

not let her stop what she had started, knew that in a moment she would not want to stop.

"It's a story. Whenever there's a strike people tell it."

"Are you calling me a liar?"

"You've remembered it from last time or the time before."

"I happen to have been told by Jack Miller."

"What does Jack Miller know?"

"He's a close friend of the Railways I.R.O."

"Oh, how silly you are," she said. She went quickly between the tables towards the door. Tony was coming after her but she hurried ahead to the ladies.

She stayed ten minutes, crying in front of the mirror. No one else was there, then a stout middle-aged woman. Heather turned away. She could hear this large woman's steady panting near the basins, then it stopped.

"What's up, dear?"

"Nothing."

"You don't want to worry" Her panting began again. She seemed to be moving around the cloakroom, turning a tap, splashing water, then in a far corner. At one moment Heather glanced sideways and she was holding a damp white pad to her forehead.

"Give 'em hell," she said. "They aren't worth it."

From the door she said, "Can I bring you something?"

"No, thanks." Heather wanted to cry again for her rough kindness. She dried her eyes, put on a lot of powder and some bright lipstick and went out of the ladies towards the dance.

Near the bar the two men who had been balancing whisky glasses were fighting. They wore tailcoats, underpants, socks and shoes but no trousers. It made her laugh but this started her tears again and she had to stay and watch. They pummelled each other as if performing a charade of boxers in a clinch but she thought they were hurting each other. The thin crowd laughed, then was uncertain. The short freckled man advanced. "Hey chaps, go easy." For a second they stared at him, then he was sitting on the floor, feet in the air, and they were each

pulling a trouser leg. She saw ten inches of tightly stretched blue braces, but she was better now and went towards the ball-room.

They were dancing and she was glad not to find them together waiting for her. When they returned in pairs they spoke to her, not purposefully as if they had agreed to do this but naturally. They even asked her to dance, Bill Stope, Charles, Tony—though not Bertie Gaymer

She began to wonder whether, astonishingly, it hadn't seemed important to them. It was almost more insulting.

They left at three and Tony drove her home.

"I enjoyed that, Tony."

He grunted, crouching over the wheel, both hands at the top, his head near them. He had something to say but it wasn't ready yet. Perhaps it would never be ready. At times like this she wanted to shout with impatience at the slow way his mind worked.

"Why did you walk out on Bertie?"

"Did I? I'm sorry." There seemed a chance she could escape by some unmeant apology. She didn't want to spoil the evening which she had honestly half enjoyed.

"Of course you did."

"Oh." Already the chance was smaller, almost gone.

After a short silence he said, "Well, why?"

"Because I'm upset by that sort of nonsense. Surely it was better to go away."

"It was bloody rude, man. He was my guest."

"I'm sorry. I didn't know."

He didn't even grunt, just drove with heavy anger.

"Tony," she said, "when you take me out it doesn't give you the right to control what I say."

He didn't answer.

He didn't begin again and she was surprised. After several minutes she began cautiously to think he might have accepted what she had said, though of course he would never say so.

Even when he had dropped her at her door and given her a

small kiss on the cheek she was still unsure. It wasn't like Tony to leave things unsettled. Usually he wanted victory or at least agreement. Often he would repeat this several times, till she wanted to scream, till she had sometimes believed he was intentionally making sure it was no longer true.

## Chapter Eleven

A WEEK later he took her to the Limuru point-to-point.

As they drove through town in the bright afternoon sunlight she was reminded of the strike by a lorry load of teen-age European schoolboys in grey shorts and pink blazers, going to the station to help move goods.

It had lasted ten days now. All day they squatted outside the Railway Building in the burning sun, then at four-thirty marched in long shambling procession through the bottom of the town to the locations. Perhaps there weren't so many as at first. A lot were said to have taken this chance to go to the reserves to see their wives. When their money gave out they would come hurrying back. The railways were running with only a little loss of time, worked by Asian and European staff and volunteers.

They followed the lorry, jolting ahead of them, the fair haired boys with long thin thighs, holding on to the iron framework. They weren't singing or laughing as she might have expected, but serious as if something in this work worried them, perhaps just lifting and pushing heavy objects which they had never in their lives had to do. How astonishing that people should be making it into a racial struggle, as if they wanted to hurry on their own disaster.

Glancing sideways she saw Tony watching them.

"The railways have never run so efficiently."

She guessed he would have liked to be with them, working hard for what he believed.

"Can't think why they don't dismiss them. They've proved they aren't needed."

They were climbing now, through the Kiambu coffee estates, the suburbs spreading here, cool white architect-



designed houses among blue gums at Rosslyn, then for a few miles the messy reserve, cows and goats on the road, rows of traders' shacks of corrugated iron, the wooden skeletons of the square huts the Kikuyu were being allowed to build. She wanted to ask Tony what he had been doing all week.

Looking for a job, presumably, but he would have said if he had found one. She did not want to remind him of rejections he would be trying to forget, knowing how each would make him feel less wanted. There were many Kenya born Europeans unemployed, the *Standard* said. Because they were Europeans there were a limited number of jobs good enough for them and the large companies preferred to bring staff from abroad. She knew that Tony could not compete with these better educated young men, felt it unfair that no one should value the qualities he had.

"Heard about the procession?" he said.

"What procession?"

"What's that? You don't know?"

But today she could smile at his crude teasing, had an idea that in a moment he might smile too. Almost, it seemed that he was coming to accept things as they were.

"On Freedom Day. Whoever heard of bloody Freedom Day?" He paused, as if the words had made him more angry than he had meant. "They're so damned cunning. First the strike to give them an idle crowd. Then Freedom Day and a procession. Ndolo's collecting a petition to the Prime Minister. Hasn't he told you?"

"No." It was the first time he had shown that he knew she met William. It wasn't the way he told her but the way he had hidden it that frightened her, making her understand how important it was to him.

Surprisingly, he became more cheerful and in a minute, because she was happy to be out of the city on this sun-filled afternoon, the country falling away behind them as they climbed to seven thousand feet, she was hopeful again. She was glad she had been firm with him after the dance. She

thought that because he was fundamentally honest, the most honest person she knew, he was going to treat her in an honest straightforward way, accepting her right to differ.

She sat on the grass against the bonnet of his car in the strong sun, glad of the wide straw hat she had bought at the coast—though the wind up here stayed cool. In front of her the horses thundered, rose at the brushwood fence and were lost over the rise, to reappear later, a succession of toy-like brown and white figures among the belts of trees on the horizon, such a long time later that it was difficult to believe they had been galloping hard all those minutes.

Tony stood with his buttocks against the bonnet. Glancing up once she saw them unexpectedly large inside the breeches he wore, though he wasn't riding. He told her about the horses. He had a professional knowledge of these so that he felt no need to be dogmatic and listened when she questioned him, explaining carefully why she was probably wrong. She was excited to sit near him while he told her about things he understood and liked. When he walked away to talk to his friends she didn't come. Presently, with his help, she would be strong enough for that too.

His friends were also dressed for the occasion, in tweed suits and green pork pies, carrying shooting sticks and binoculars. Tony drank beer with them at the bar, came back to her, went to drink with them again. He was looking after her and this afternoon she was glad to give way to his protection.

She understood more clearly since the Muthaiga dance the effort of self-justification taking her among his friends must require and wondered how he made it, knowing how he saw any complicated argument as deceit and when offered one seriously would laugh. But she knew that once he had decided to bring her he would do it with absolute loyalty, stupidity if you like. Today there seemed no need to call it that. It made what she was doing seem more serious, so that for a moment she was surprised at her own courage.

The horses thundered and disappeared and thundered again.

She watched the cumulus clouds, piled in a grey and white tower above the horizon. Up here at Limuru the sky seemed wider, like a painting on a bigger canvas so that although this great pile of clouds was vaster with more detail than any she could remember it occupied only a low part of the northern sky. Somewhere inside was Kenya and she watched for its snowy peak but it didn't come out. The sun went straight down the sky and unexpectedly at five had no more power so that she shivered.

They drove home among the bright polished cars which passed at sixty and seventy down the sweeping bends, two thousand feet to Nairobi. Tony's car wouldn't go so fast but on Banana Hill he tried to make it and then the continuous rattles were joined by new violent vibrations, as if every piece of the car was shaking at its own rhythm and her hands, gripping the sides of her seat, were wet with sweat. After that he seemed content to go more slowly, letting the Fords and Mercedes flash past.

Once, at the top of a rise they saw the city below, white and glittering on the plain. It seemed surprisingly small, the houses of the European suburbs which spread for seven miles to west and north hidden among the trees of their green gardens. At the Thika roundabout they passed a group of Africans. They carried no banners and made no noise, just walked in a ragged column, but she thought they were part of the strike.

He saw them quickly, almost with relief. "If they aren't careful they'll get more than they bargained for." It was as if they gave him a chance to improve something he had said badly.

"They don't know what they're doing. It's the bloody agitators."

"You can't call trades union leaders agitators. In England they'd laugh."

"I'm not in England, man. Nor are you. Sometimes I think . . ."

"What?"

He wouldn't say.

"What do you think?"

If only he would answer before she could no longer stop the angry things which hurried through her mind. But of course she must let him win with his schoolboy trick, mustn't start to tease, dodging his clumsy attacks.

It was the way he was making it unsafe for her to speak at all that she resented, because he heard in anything she said the disloyal things he knew she thought.

"Mr. William bloody Ndolo . . ."

"But he's a politician. He's nothing to do with the Unions. They may be all wicked, Tony, but you must see they're different. He hasn't any control over the strike. He's said so."

He gave a harsh laugh to tell her she had handed him the argument. "One day he'll go a step too far."

"And what'll happen?"

"I wouldn't be in his shoes." It was the tone for the frightened junior at school. I wouldn't advise you to do that again. The unknown threat, not the beating you could pretend to laugh at, something worse.

"Tony don't you see it would be wonderful." She knew it was the moment to explain things which must be made clear between them. "All their meetings and plotting. It must be like Russia in the revolution. Their whole lives are taken up with it. I should like to be one of them." She wanted him to understand that her ideas were not destructive but exciting, full of hope.

He said nothing.

"So would you, Tony."

He sat heavily at the wheel, trying by his unfair silence to drag her to a stop, make her ashamed. But she wasn't ashamed now.

"Surely you can imagine what it would be like? We all want to give our lives to something. Something we believe in—only we can't find anything. They've got it. Half the time they're so

excited about it they can't remember to be serious. You may not agree with them but surely you can see what it must be like . . ."

He had turned and was staring at her, forcing her to stop because she was sure in a moment he would drive off the road. "Man, you're mad."

"Oh, no, Tony . . ." but there was nothing more to say. Suddenly the whole hopeful afternoon which had given her courage to talk to him crumbled, not a thing which had really happened, only something she had wished. He looked away now, watching the road.

"So are they. The difference is, they may have something coming to them which'll bring them to their senses."

"What's coming to them?"

But he wouldn't answer. For a moment she thought she had accidentally made him tell her something, then knew it was the same empty threat.

They passed the club, the prosperous European houses with twelve foot garden hedges of white and mauve creeper, then the concrete Asian houses of Parklands in ocean liner style.

He said, "Pony, why not drop it?"

"Drop what?"

"There's a limit to how much mucking around I can take."

"Oh, Tony, you don't think I'm doing it for you?" She was astonished at the conceit, then did not believe it was his own, imagined some friend saying, "She's leading you a dance." She must not force him to defend it, making himself more absurd.

"I just don't know," he said. His sudden collapse took her by surprise, half brought the tenderness she felt when he was confused.

"Tony, it's not true."

But she doubted if he accepted it. Presently he said, "Why can't we forget bloody politics?"

For a second she wondered if he had said something wise, then knew the answers but was reluctant to give them.

"You can't forget politics."

He grunted.

"Everything's political. The town, the roads, the laws, all the things you hate or like come from a political decision."

He shrugged his shoulders. It was an argument he didn't care to join.

"It's irresponsible not to be interested," but she was sorry to lecture.

"Why must we get involved?"

"Because they involve us, Tony." She went on thinking about it, aware that she might need politics more than they needed her. She wasn't pleased with her barren intellectual answers, knowing how they would seem to him words which had ceased to resemble life. She wished he would give her the chance to say so

But he was silent too, as if he had given some warning he had planned. She guessed that this, a week after the dance, had been his answer.

She was more sure she was right when he dropped her at home. "There it is then, Pony."

His inarticulateness made her desperate. Why couldn't he explain so that she could answer? But of course he couldn't explain what he only half understood. And if she tried to answer now he would not accept it. Like his answer, hers would have to come after a week or ten days. His slowness made everything she had said seem like the talking of a child, the half formed thoughts which adults kept to themselves.

## Chapter Twelve

SHE took her pill at ten, undressed and went to bed. It made no difference. She had noticed lately that they had less effect.

Sometimes for several seconds her heart seemed quiet, then for no reason began to give heavy beats. Once she sat up quickly, breathing fast, her mouth open, sure it had been about to stop. After two minutes—or was it three, her brain would start to decay . . .

She wasn't in love with Tony, she was sure of that. Perhaps she wasn't capable of the sort of love which everyone else felt so easily and which seemed to excuse them from any more need to be frightened about their lives. It was just that Tony had always been there, and if he wasn't she might not be able to bear it. Sometimes the vanity of trying to make her own life shocked her. It was less that she felt unable to achieve it than incapable of truly wanting it.

If only she felt strong enough to give him up. Or strong enough not to give him up. She thought of dressing at once and going to see him, tried hard to know what she should say. It seemed desperately important to decide now, while she could see so clearly the alternatives. But a row with Tony would destroy any chance of sleep. If only she could get well and strong, so that her life would not seem such a perilous thing which might be upset by a small mistake and finally broken.

At eleven-thirty she turned on her back. She was becoming more and more awake and could now only lie and wait the next hour and a half. This time perhaps she should take two. The doctor had said she might in an emergency. She wondered if this was an emergency. Or perhaps he had only said it to comfort her. She did not understand how doctors could carry

in their minds for every drug the correct phrase. "After three hours a further one or even two tablets may be taken." They said it with confidence but she believed it was a trick.

At one she swallowed the second pill. She lay quietly for two minutes, then, at the thought that it might fail, sat up quickly and took another. She lay in the darkness and waited for the fuzziness they should for certain bring. For half an hour it was coming. If it didn't work this time . . . What had she done with the box? It wasn't safe to leave it where she could reach it. In her confusion she might take more. She sat up quickly, turned on the light and carried it to a drawer at the far side of the room. As she came back she saw her small blue-pyjama'd figure in the mirror and caught herself being pleased by its neat prettiness. She laughed at how parts of her mind went on working without remembering what other parts should be telling them.

But she stayed looking at herself, the calves of her legs coming out of her half length pyjama trousers, not fat but well made, her breasts holding out the jacket. She looked with curiosity, but after a moment with less interest. The shadows here hid her tired face, the loosening skin of her neck. The lack of oxygen at this height made the skin grow old quickly.

As soon as she lay down and turned out the light there was a mosquito in her net. That was hopeless. She sat up at once. She knew from the effortless way she could sit how far she was from sleep. She knelt on the sheets, saw it near the circular top, stood and clapped at it. The springs tilted and she half overbalanced and had to sit quickly. Perhaps the pills were after all having an effect, but the fall had set her heart pounding. She couldn't see it now and was unsure whether she had hit it. There was no mark on her hands. She knelt again, looking all round the inside of the net tent. She was about to turn off the light when she found it, sitting not a foot from her head. This time it left blood on her hands. Her blood perhaps.

After that the pills really began to work but there were more



mosquitoes. She could hear them, droning nearer and she struck at them in the darkness. She wasn't sure if they were inside or outside her net. Presently she could not bear the uncertainty, got out and began to hunt them with a towel on the walls behind her bed and the ceiling above, staggering heavily.

By Monday she knew that there was nothing dramatic or sudden to do. She must go on trying as she had been trying for a year now, succeeding a little here, failing a little there. Gradually the result would become clear. One thing, she must get some better pills. Now, when she was strong, to give herself no choice, she emptied the last six down the lavatory and worked the handle.

Dr. Seth was heavy and short, completely bald and shiny except for strong growths of grey hair above each ear, like an owl. He wore horn glasses and watched her all the time, making her feel understood and protected.

Her parents had had another doctor, a four foot six polo playing woman with a vast sunburned open neck who drove a Land Rover and often came with a new story of how she had winched herself out of a mud hole. It had been part of the plan when she came back to Kenya that she should have a different doctor.

"Well, my dear, how are we today?"

Dr. Seth didn't conduct her illness in the hurried way of her English doctor, proposing a remedy with a confidence she could not share because she remembered that he had proposed the last with the same confidence, often forgetting the things she had told him about herself. There had been an impatience about her English doctor as if he hoped each time that he would not have to see her again. She felt that Dr. Seth would always be glad to see her, to continue the long careful campaign of making her better.

He listened to her without expression, making her sure he was learning more from her words than they meant.

"You haaf finished them?"

"Yes but . . ."

"You haaf finished every one?"

"Yes."

She thought he raised his eyebrows.

"Is that a lot?"

"No no," he said and waited for her to go on.

"You see they just don't work" she said desperately.

"I am sure we can fix that," he said cheerily.

She felt relieved, at the same time cheated, thinking that he could have reassured her a moment earlier but had intentionally let her become frightened.

He wrote a prescription, but seemed in no hurry to give it her, held it up to the light, blew on it, put it down to clarify a word.

"So you haaf come back to us, my dear."

"Yes?" She was surprised that he seemed to have taken seven months to notice.

"This is a funny country."

"You're telling me," she said.

He didn't answer, seemed to be working towards something he had to say which did not need her help.

"It is not a country I would stay in if I had any choice."

"Why not go then?" Suddenly she was angry with the way he was talking at her not with her, with the advice she thought he was going to give which was so irrelevant.

"My dear, how could I? I haaf four or five hundred children here."

She looked at him with wide eyes, not trusting herself to believe such a confession. Perhaps he saw this because he went on with no smile, "Ones I haaf brought into the world."

"I see."

"Do not mistake me, when the time comes I shall go. This will be no place for us when they are running it."

"Why not?"

He ignored her. "They are going now, the wise ones. Oh,

yes, many more Europeans are leaving than coming. Those are some figures which they do not publish, but I haaf seen them ”

“Isn’t that a good thing?”

“What is that?”

“If they don’t like it here they’d better go.”

For a moment Dr. Seth didn’t answer. The prescription was dry and he passed it across the desk to her.

“My dear, you may think this is not my business—though as for that everything is your doctor’s business because it affects your health. Are you not getting yourself a bit involved? So that you worry about it—and you know you must not worry.”

She was too shocked to answer. He went on, as if trying to modify something he had not thought would upset her so much. “Now would not some riding, say, do you more good? Nothing like the exercise of the body for ills of the mind. That is old as the hills but still true.”

“Who told you to say this to me?”

“I do not haaf to be told what to say to you,” he said, suddenly angry as if she had insulted him professionally, though it might still be part of the treatment. It didn’t matter because she had finished with Dr. Seth. She could not understand how she had ever thought him wise or understanding.

She stood outside on the pavement, under the overcast morning sky, shivering with indignation.

## Chapter Thirteen

SHE bought her pills, then drove to Himji Motors where her Morris Minor was serviced.

Sitting in Himji's office a curious calm came to her which she had not felt for several days. Here was someone she could trust in a way she could not trust the other people she knew, someone who was not all the time forcing her to conform to their own idea of what she ought to be; someone who accepted her as she was, and was now ordering her a Pepsi-Cola.

Of course she knew she shouldn't trust him, that when it came to shooting a charging animal or standing in front of an angry crowd Tony, perhaps even Dr. Seth, certainly William would do better. She knew that Himji was already considering what percentage he could make on the retread tyre she needed. None of these things mattered compared to his gentle kindness which seemed something she had ceased to expect.

Everything about Himji seemed a little greasy, the soft grey skin of his hands and wrists, coming out of his white cuffs with the single oil mark, his black hair which started to go back in a shiny sweep but changed to matted strands. He wore a ring with a single ruby on his middle finger and had gold stoppings, a large one covering half a tooth near the centre and more just in sight at the sides. When Himji leaned forward she tried not to move back from the strong smell of garlic he breathed, even in the morning.

Beyond his fat shoulders, through the window of his small glass office she could see the inside of his corrugated iron garage. Here everything was confused and oily black, the concrete floor, the wooden shelves of spare parts, the overalls

of the African mechanics, even the water in the wash basin and the towel over a tyre beside it. Except a central puddle where the roof leaked which was rust brown with a rainbow film of grease. Himji's office had been meant as a smart clean retreat from all this.

But already there were black finger marks on the white paint and the many panes were dusty. On Himji's desk were scraps of torn paper with money calculations, and on the shelf behind a cardboard box with a half unpacked chromium headlamp, a pile of fanbelts and three soft drink bottles with dregs of brown liquid and bent straws. Half hidden by these was a silver framed photo of Himji at a reception, enjoying a joke with the head of his community. He looked clean and slim, though it had been taken only two years ago.

Nailed to the wall below was a much larger frame of prize certificates won by Himji's dog. "He is wonderful beast. You should have seen him last week when I am taking him to his lady love . . ." They looked faded as if they had been left in the sun and dust before being put behind glass.

She understood how everything here had been done with enthusiasm which had barely survived till the job was finished because already the fact was so much poorer than the dream.

"Also I suppose I should have a new jack."

"Oh, but you do not want that. We will get you very good second-hand jack. Save you seventy, eighty shillings "

"Can you really?"

"That is easy thing. You want to come see?"

Because she was still not ready for the office, she agreed and half stood to go with him, but Himji didn't move and she remembered the Pepsi-Cola, still to come before anything could be done. When the African mechanic returned he had brought Coca-Cola. There was a long angry discussion in Swahili.

"Honestly I don't mind."

"No, no, no, Miss Carew, he is just a silly boy. You ask for Pepsi, you have Pepsi."

As soon as he had gone two tall young Asians came in. They were the very people Himji most wanted her to meet, his cousin-brother Dev, and his cousin-brother Zool. Another African mechanic was sent for two orange Fantas. At once there was an animated discussion in Gujarati about jacks. Heather knew this because every now and again in the rapid flow of excited sound she heard the word "screwjack" or "hydraulicjack", orientalised but clear. She wanted to tell them they should not worry, then did not like to interrupt something which they seemed to be so much enjoying.

When it was over they shook hands and left, as if only second-hand jacks had given them courage to stay in her company.

"He is hell of a fellow, Zool," Himji said. "He is having this great big Mercedes and every day he is killing himself. He is his father's pain in the neck—that is right, Miss Carew? Please to tell me."

Both Africans came back together, the first still with the two Coca-Colas which he couldn't change because the shop wasn't a Pepsi-Cola agent, the second with two lemon Fantas.

"You see, Miss Carew, it is this which we are all the time having to compete with. In this case—Pepsi-Cola, Coca-Cola, what does it matter? It is the same stuff. Oh yes, I have a friend who knows. How 'bout if I send out for new engine for Zephyr and this African boy is coming back with new engine for Rover? And if my back is turned they will be fitting it too. Oh, yes, they will say they do not notice any difference. That is not true. It is because they are so much wanting to see my face when I find out. It is very much frightening them, my face, but still they must be wanting to see it. Oh, yes, they are very little children, Miss Carew."

Every shop was a second-hand car part shop. The piles of greasy metal started near the pavement and rose inside, sometimes to box shelves, often just to six foot mounds against the back wall.

Sometimes there were counters and Asians behind them with brown teeth. More often the owners squatted among their goods, talking together, making a social occasion of grace and politeness. No doubt they were discussing discounts and bargains, but she saw them as the remains of a civilised way of doing business when the exchange of money for goods had been only half the purpose and the shopkeeper half reluctant to part with his goods.

The counter put a barrier between buyer and seller. She was angry with people who divided things in this unrealistic way, making work by definition something to dislike and idleness something to like.

Himji knew them all and asked one after another for a jack. Even those with no shelves but piles of metal knew at once whether they had one.

She was introduced with ceremony to a small plump Asian with red eyes, a leading member of Himji's community and he walked with them for a moment, then left to take his place behind a counter.

"What an amazing place."

"Oh, yes, it is very amazing. Sometimes there is a car stolen one night and by next morning you will not find it. It is here but it is in many many hundreds of tiny pieces in many different shops." He told her this sadly but not critically, because he was not talking about a distant class of criminals but about his own people.

"There is being this police officer who was very clever chap. He is knowing who is thief and who not thief and all different degrees of thief. No no, Miss Carew, I do not laugh at him. It is difficult long business and he is truly just beginning to know a little, a very very little. This man is needing new hub cap for his left front wheel, so of course he is coming to the

place where there are many hub caps and going to this shop and that shop then paying very clever cheap price because he is learning how we are liking to bargain. After that he is walking round his car to drive away and would you believe it, he is needing two new hub caps for his right side wheels."

The sun was coming now and it was pleasant to walk with Himji along the crowded pavements, sometimes a little giddy from her two bad nights but no longer unhappy. Not happy either, just resting. It was half past twelve before a jack was found and brought to Himji's garage and washed in petrol and stowed in the boot of her car.

She began to take money out of her bag.

"No no, Miss Carew."

"Yes, I must."

"Please no, Miss Carew. We will send you account if you insist." It was partly that he did not want the occasion spoiled by money and partly that he was shocked that anyone should voluntarily pay cash. But when she held out the notes he took them, grabbing a little she thought, shutting them quickly into his drawer as if he would rather forget them.

"Miss Carew, it is so kind of you to come and see us."

"It isn't kind. I come because you're cheaper." His subservience annoyed her, the assumption that she did him an honour by using him. But she had hurt him and hurried on, "Look—you've just saved me fifty shillings," trying to laugh.

"That is true, Miss Carew," but he was still hurt.

It made her angry with the years of British rule which had put up these barriers to prevent them behaving naturally to each other. And with Himji because he accepted them, was willing to be so undignified to achieve any sort of warm relationship with these cold Europeans he didn't understand.

She said, "I belong to a sort of study group. We're having a debate tonight. Would you come?"



He smiled, shaking his head sadly. "Miss Carew, I am not very good debater."

"Just come and see what it's like." But already she doubted if she should have asked him, began to see him as others would, his black greasy hair and gold stoppings.

## Chapter Fourteen

It was a hot airless afternoon, the sun high in dazzling blue. She drew the curtains and lay still in her dark bedroom, still not ready for the office till she had slept a night. When she turned, her bare shoulders above her petticoat were wet where she had sweated against the sheets. She fell into a heavy sleep and woke at six, feeling that she had been away a long way. It was as if she had emerged from some bad dream. Presently she realised that this had not happened while she was asleep but had been the last three days of her life.

The study group's meeting had become a brains trust. She liked these least, became irritated when she could not contradict the absurd things the panel said. Tonight an African Nominated Member, a grey haired lady from England and a civil servant who had retired to Nanyuki were answering questions read out by Henry Burch.

She was surprised to see Henry here. It was the sort of well-intentioned society she thought he despised. Perhaps because she had thought he laughed at her for belonging to such societies she had seen him only a few times since she had come back. Or perhaps, after the help his letters had given her, it was inevitable that she should have been shocked to meet this thin little man to whom she had been confiding. Without his beard she had been unsure at first that it was him. He grinned at her now from his chairman's seat, across the carpet of the neat modern flat, between the old ladies on cushions against the walls. Somehow it was another disappointment to find that after all he joined in the good works she had thought he despised as well as encouraged, as if after four years he was beginning to compromise.

The old ladies were school teachers and missionaries, resting

from up country or working in the Nairobi locations. There were young people too, junior civil servants and pale young men from England with oil or tobacco companies. She guessed they had come by mistake, because they did not understand how they were committing themselves, doubted if they would still be coming in three months. By then, anyway, their dinners and sundowners would hardly leave them time.

Except for the Nominated Member there were no Africans but a few young Asian lawyers and an Asian lecturer from the technical college, brought by one of the missionary ladies. Himji didn't seem to know them.

He was quiet here, listening carefully, his hands clasped between his knees, as if unsure what to do with them. Here he could not lay one along the back of the next chair as he tilted his own, work them both up and down in front of him to make a point, shake hands with one while he held his friend's shoulder with the other. Here he must keep them clasped together in case they accidentally struck someone. She noticed his shape again, realising that it reminded her of a type of wide squat whisky bottle.

First there were funny questions, like "What three men on earth would the panel send in the first rocket to the moon?" and "What historical figure would the members of the panel most like to have been?" The grey haired lady said Florence Nightingale, the retired civil servant said Nelson, and the African Nominated member said, "Your Meester Gladstone because he was such a true liberal." She caught his name now, Wiraluga, and remembered things she had heard. Henry Burch said he had always wanted to be St. Paul. She thought he said it to see the missionary ladies gape at the idea of this transformation and laughed and found herself liking him.

Slipped in between the funny questions were some religious ones. "Does the team consider a personal religion can be as valid for the individual as membership of an organised church?" When it was Wiraluga's turn to answer she was

afraid that he would say something disturbing to these ladies, showing them what an unwanted interference their whole lives had been.

"My people have always been a very religious people. Perhaps soon we shall have come beyond the making of qualities we admire into a person, but you must remember that at present we are still a simple people. If we think a cow is a very wonderful thing we will make a cow into a God, the best conceivable cow . . ." When Heather dared to glance at them they seemed undisturbed, their old sunstained faces set in firm expressions, much less disturbed than by the idea of Henry Burch as St. Paul at which they had given some harsh nervous laughs.

Last there was the political question. "Does the panel believe in a multi-racial society?" The retired civil servant from Nanyuki was one hundred per cent in favour, based of course on mutual safeguards and mutual respect. All communities had something valuable to bring to this country. That meant the Europeans who were still, it should be remembered, the backbone of its economy; the Africans who, it had to be admitted, were the most numerous; and the Asians who made their own special contribution to its commercial life. Side by side these three races, representative of the civilisations and traditions of three continents . . . It was mere political theorising to suggest that they should or even could be broken down in favour of some hybrid society, without roots in the past.

Heather became more and more upset. It was his satisfaction with his opinions which worried her, as if he still believed them to be gallantly liberal as they might have been five years ago.

"What about education?"

They were surprised and silent, sensing her indignation which she had failed to hide.

"As I was explaining . . . three traditions . . . side by side. Only with such safeguards can mutual respect . . ."

"How can we possibly understand each other if we're brought up separately?"

"I'm not denying that in a hundred years, perhaps even fifty . . ."

"Oh, how awful."

"What's that?" He was confused. "Would you please explain."

"It means you've learned nothing."

"Are you telling me you accept what common education implies?" Suddenly he was angry. "You accept—miscegenation?" The word embarrassed him but now she had forced him to use it, he was confident that he had crushed her.

"Of course."

"You yourself would take your place in such a society?"

"Oh, yes, we haven't any choice . . ." She noticed how attentive they had all become, staring at her, applying what she was saying to herself. She grew hot in the face. "Oh, no . . ." but anything she said now would make them more curious.

"Well, ladies and gentlemen . . ." Henry Burch thanked the panel and announced next week's meeting.

Outside in the mild night Himji said, "That was most interesting, Miss Carew."

"You didn't enjoy it."

"Yes indeed. You are doing these things often?"

"Once a week."

"That is really so?" The idea amazed him. After a moment he seemed to turn to something gayer. "Now you are coming to have some curry with me. You and your friend Mr Burch."

She would have preferred to go home, had seen Himji enough today.

"No no, I am positively inviting."

It was a modern two-storey house in an Asian estate, a hot weather copy of a suburban villa—except for the garden. Even in the dark she recognised the flowerless plot of trodden yellow clay with tufts of lank grass.

"Miss Carew, allow me to wish you to my house." But as she came into the bright cream room, with two white electric tubes near the ceiling he watched her anxiously. "You think it is small."

"No, I don't."

"Yes, you do. And you are right, but what does it matter if the heart is big, do you not agree?"

Unlike his office it was tidy and clean. There were armchairs of yellow laminated plywood and chromium piping. In glass fronted cases below the metal window frames were toy animals of coloured glass and toy plastic Red Indians. On the longest wall hung a set of black shelves with a wooden roof like a Swiss chalet and a chromium garden fence round each shelf. The glass of whisky he brought her had alternate frosted silver bands and frosted gold stars.

"Miss Carew, you are so unlike your brother."

It was Charles who had recommended Himji Motors.

"So like but so unlike."

He might have said other things about her brother but waited for her to encourage him.

"I am so glad to have met you." He pulled a chair close to her and sat on its edge, leaning forward, staring into her eyes, as if there was something missing from what he had said which he must try to add. They were alone in the small bright room, Burch and Wiraluga on the gravel drive, talking in low voices, but she had an impression of other people in the house and once a curtain moved and two feet from the floor a small Indian face showed.

Himji sighed and sat back, defeated perhaps by his English, but she was afraid that she was disappointing him. She was relieved when the curtain moved again and his wife came in.

She wore a bright green sari and carried a small child, smiled, nodded and made one or two small noises in her nose, but didn't speak. Just when Heather thought she would go she said a sharp word to Himji. At once they were speaking fast in Gujarati. Her face wasn't gentle now but emphatic and

hard Himji crossed to the door. "Excuse me, excuse me," and he went out into the night. His wife gave another quick smile and went through the curtain.

Almost at once the two young cousin-brothers she had met at the garage arrived with a tall Sikh. The Sikh was called Billy and sat next to her. She asked him whether he had to retie his turban each morning, surprised to hear herself do it but surprised too that she had never wondered before. No no, he said and lifted it off in one piece. His soft black hair was tied in a round top knot.

"A good turban is lasting one week."

"Miss Carew, will you be caring to come for a small spin?"

"Himji . . ." she began.

"You must not worry about Himji," Dev said.

"He will be gone many hours," Zool said.

"He has this friend who is shooting himself."

"Oh, he didn't tell me."

"He is not wishing to upset you. He is very unhappy. His wife too."

"Himji's wife?"

"No no, this friend's wife. You see he is missing."

"He's gone to look for him?"

"Half hitting and half missing."

They drove fast down the airport road and tonight the comfort of the great car, like a gently undulating mattress prevented her believing in accidents. She thought, when we crash our names will be in the papers together and that will prove to everyone what they want to believe. The idea was completely unfrightening, almost attractive.

She sat between Dev and Zool, who talked continuously across her, no longer shy as they had seemed in the morning. Billy the Sikh sat in the back. They drove to Athi River, turned and raced back up the long climb to Nairobi, quieter now and she watched the plains in the grey light of the half moon which had come up over the hills to the east. They passed farm roads with boards and she recognised the names of

friends of her parents she had visited as a child. It was hard to imagine them, five miles away in the hills, cut off in their small farmhouses. They were part of a different life and she could not of course visit them again.

Presently Dev sang an Indian song and she recognised the melancholy quarter tones she had often heard on the Asian broadcasting service before her parents switched it off

Himji was there and so was his wife, sitting at a table close to the curtained doorway, her back to the room, as if ready to escape. At the same table was a much older Indian woman, her sari over her head and across her mouth, a small bright stone set in each side of her nose. Henry Burch and Wiraluga sat in upright chairs along one wall and next to them an Indian boy of fifteen and a sandy haired European schoolboy.

"Oh, you are such naughty chaps. Did I not warn you, Miss Carew, what naughty chaps they were." Himji didn't mention the wounded friend, giving Heather the curious feeling that she must have misunderstood the whole story.

"Now we shall play a game. By request of son and heir." This was the Indian boy of fifteen who wore blue jeans, his black hair curved into greasy waves.

The game was called Pussy. One person crawled on the floor pretending to be a cat, rubbing himself against the knees of the others. As soon as he made them smile they became the pussy.

Wiraluga played it well. He was short and heavy, and it was easy to imagine him playing it with a large number of his own children. Henry Burch was an anxious sexy female cat. She wondered how she was sure of this. Billy the Sikh refused to play but broke into new astonished laughter as each person began to crawl and purr.

When it was Himji's son's turn the sandy-haired European boy held her arm with excitement. "Now you watch. He's wonderful. Isn't he good? Look at him."

After the game she talked to Wiraluga, knowing she must stay excited or might quickly become totally exhausted. There



wasn't much other conversation and sometimes she heard her own nervous talking. But he answered shortly.

Dev and Zool were silent again, perhaps because of some way they were related to Himji. Billy moved from person to person, pouring whisky into glasses. When he found one full he said "Bottoms up," once or twice, as if testing a magic word. If it didn't work he moved on without comment.

After several minutes, as if he had decided that he could trust her, Wiraluga said, "I am not afraid of these men. If they wish to have a procession . . ."

"Couldn't you advise them?"

He ignored the question, staring seriously. "Do not make a mistake. I do not mind if I am called white man's stooge, because I know I am truly a friend of my people and these men are only friends of themselves."

When he talked he worked his big flat lips continuously as if he had trouble in keeping them over his stained teeth.

"I will tell you a thing to show you how I am not their friend. I am living in a new African housing area some way from town. Because I am a poor man I am given this car each night to take me home. This too I am told is a bribe and I have sometimes thought, should I not give up this car with its official driver and walk to my work. But I know that for this they will only despise me.

"Each night my car has driven close to my door and I have been hurrying into my house, pulling the bolts quickly. This is not good. If my people wish to kill me they will manage it whatever I do. It is better not to take such precautions. Anyway I do not believe my people wish to kill me but only some paid men of these extremists.

"So now I tell my driver, leave me at the entrance to the housing estate and let me walk four hundred yards to my house. It is hard for me to tell him each night to stop and I wish to say 'drive on' but once I am out of the car I do not mind. I think that it was a trap not a protection. I walk slowly and firmly and I am not afraid any more. It is dusk when I

come home and there are people all round me in the shambas and the bushes, watching and not moving but I do not care. It is not something which I am proud of this fearlessness but something which happens to me. I like to feel that they are there all round me with no courage to run out because they are small sly men. When I pass them they cannot meet my eyes.

"It is well known that I go home this way on foot, and some say I am afraid to show my car with its government driver but this too I do not mind. Last night I reach the path to my house and there is an old woman standing there.

"It is the old women I fear most. The men are nothing. The totos too. Even when they run quickly past and spit at my feet I know it is only something they have been told to do. When I see this old woman standing beside the path to my house I feel my courage melt a little.

"When I am close to her I say, 'Jambo bibi.' She does not answer. There is no one near her and no reason why she should be there, standing alone in the dusk, waiting by my path. I have to pass her, as close as I am to you, but still I am not sure of her face. I think it is very old and horrible but it is too dark to see and she is wearing a blanket over her head. Then I am going away from her to my door and all the way I feel her eyes on my back. And in spite of myself I am shaking and afraid."

"You mean they told her to stand there?"

"If I knew I should perhaps not be telling you. They are clever, these men who are not my friends."

"You think . . . ?"

"I do not think. That is not good. I just wonder whether tonight she will again be standing there. And the next night. I wonder for how long I shall have the courage to pass her each night."

The two boys had prepared a game called Mummy. The sandy haired boy led her into a dimly lit room with a long obscure heap of clothes and blankets on the floor stretching inwards from the doorway.

"Is it a man or is it a mummy?" he said.

As she peered forward in the dim light towards its head, trying to make out its features, her ankles were gripped by two hands appearing from its feet. She gave a small cry and the sandy haired boy who had grown more and more excited as she peered, now exploded with laughter and had to support himself against the wall before he could fetch the next person.

In the sitting room again, he said, "Do you like Art?" as if he doubted now whether it had been Heather's sort of game.

"Oh yes," she said.

"My sister's terribly good at Art."

After that he kept running into the next house to fetch his sister's things: a Christmas card with black angels blowing trumpets on a yellow background and "Happy Christmas" in beautiful Gothic letters with one smudged; an egg cup painted black and red; a doll with neat pink dress and white lace underclothes.

He stood watching while they were admired, pleased of course but not surprised because he knew they deserved it.

"I'll fetch my sister if you like."

"I don't think you should wake her."

"She's not asleep."

It was after one o'clock. Later Heather wondered whether, for a second before the door opened she had guessed it was going to be Lucy.

She had thought she was pretty at the St. Mary's Club committee, but had not realised how pretty. She had her brother's teddy bear face but transformed into something simple and beautiful. She had short fair hair and a tall slim figure. But it was her manner which was more astonishing.

When she crossed the room to sit by her brother and someone was in the way she didn't try to dodge but kept still, waiting for them to move, her hands in front of her chest half closed over each other. In spite of her tallness every movement seemed neat and perfect.

She answered their questions then sat still, no longer changing the doll's dress now that no one was interested, holding it carefully in her lap, ready to leave if she wasn't wanted. Her perfect tranquillity made Heather wonder whether she had mixed parents or perhaps it was something she had learned from living here among Indians. It made other European girls seem noisy and assertive, as if under a compulsion to expose their stupidity.

Lucy must have felt her eyes for she looked up and gave a quick shy smile then down again to the doll, adjusting its clothes now, blushing a little under her soft chestnut skin. Heather was amazed at how this tiny smile had told each of them all the other was thinking, put them in some close understanding so that the questions she had wanted to ask about her school and why she lived here seemed long steps back to an earlier formality.

After half an hour Lucy left, shaking hands with everyone in the room. When it was Heather's turn and they stood in front of each other she had the strange feeling that they were alone, so that the conversation of the other people became blurred, even faded a little.

"Goodbye."

"Goodbye, Miss Carew."

The surname was a shock. How could she still use it if the things Heather had been thinking were true? Then she saw the shy smile which made it a joke.

"Will you come and see me?"

"I should like to."

For several minutes after she had gone Heather could not speak, unable at once to believe no one had noticed that anything special had happened.

Later she was sitting by Himji. The things he was saying only gradually worried her.

"Miss Carew, we are not wanted and this we are knowing."

"I don't think so."

"It does not matter what you are thinking. It is true. As a

people we are having many weaknesses, but one special weakness: we are great cowards. I will tell you what is happening one day which is making me not love my people. A gang of Africans is attacking this man and his son in the street with pangas. The man is running away. He has not stayed to help his son. And all around there are being many other Asians, many more than this gang of Africans but they are doing nothing to help this boy, not even when they are seeing his arms cut off, which he is holding up to protect his face."

"How terrible Are you sure?"

"I am sure."

"You saw it happen?" At once she was ashamed of her question.

"Me too, Miss Carew."

She was uncertain whether she felt honoured or repelled that he should tell her.

"When was this?"

"Long time ago, in the Emergency. Three, four years. Things like this do not happen now. Only last week there is this old Asian shoemaker going quietly home one night and next thing he is found by the roadside with many cuts. Week before there is this shopkeeper being chopped to little pieces in his bed. Next week, who knows."

"Surely those were robberies?"

"That is what I am saying, Miss Carew. These are being robberies. They are killing this shopkeeper for his moneys and it is just a mistake that they are forgetting to take them. And this old shoemaker, he is well known for his bags of gold which he is always carrying with him in the street."

"You can't be sure."

"I am sure, Miss Carew. It is a planned thing. They know we are cowards and they mean to frighten us so that we shall run away. There is one funny thing they are forgetting, and this is funniest thing, so that all their plans will go wrong. We are having nowhere to run. It is true. Even you who have been born here have another home. We have not. We are not

knowing India. I, like many others, am never going there. Even if we are having money to go they are not wishing us."

She knew that nothing she had done since she had come back to Africa had made her afraid she would be attacked or murdered. She knew too that there was nothing to stop her taking a plane and leaving for ever tomorrow. Nothing except her own determination.

She wanted desperately to be allowed to commit herself so that there could be no escape, to be on the inside, not for ever being told what this felt like.

"They are foolish too," Himji said, "but not in a cowardly way. They will overstep themselves. Now they are full of confidence, so sure of themselves. In a little while we shall be having more arrests and trials with paid witnesses and mass hangings."

"They won't dare. Not again."

"Oh, yes, they will dare because they cannot help it. And your colonial government will dare because it is not giving up yet. It has an instinct to preserve itself. It goes on killing people long after it is itself dead."

She shook her head, but not because she disagreed.

"Five years ago, before the Emergency all up and down the reserves in isolated places you are finding little Asian shops. Today, where are they? You can see some in ruins. Others are quite gone. You cannot blame these shopkeepers. They were the most isolated."

"They weren't the only ones to run away," she said.

"Not only," Himji said, "but first."

## Chapter Fifteen

SHE woke drugged and confused from Dr. Seth's pills. It wasn't a new sensation but today her morning pills didn't clear it. The whole long exhausting day she had been running away and had not understood it till late in the evening.

At the office there was a letter from Willmington.

"Dear Miss Carew,

I am writing to confirm your candidature for the position of Vice-Chairman at the forthcoming A.G.M. of the St. Mary's Club. Unless I hear to the contrary, may I take it that you are willing to stand?

"Sincerely yours,

"Cecil Willmington."

She had been proposed and seconded. There was no reason for him to write. She was certain it was part of some scheme against her. Perhaps she should never have agreed to stand—but she wasn't going to think about that again, wanted to be quickly elected so that she could prove she wasn't bought so easily.

She stared out of the window at the ferro-concrete office block, the workmen silhouetted against the overcast sky. She wondered if Willmington was trying to frighten her into withdrawing. He'd learn something there too. It was forty minutes before Robinson arrived.

She heard the squeal of his chair castors, a long squeal back then several short squeals as he jerked himself forward. She could imagine his relief to have the weight off his little legs. Now he was settling into his pose of benevolent importance, ready for anyone who might call, prepared to feed it into the telephone. She thought Robinson sometimes took several

minutes to become benevolent and important at the office—after what happened to him at home.

He would have noticed with irritation that she was here today. She added a person to his staff and his importance—otherwise he would have sacked her by now. He would be marking her name in the attendance register. Unexpectedly his chair squealed again and he was crossing the office.

"Someone rang you yesterday." He stood in her doorway, his short arms suggesting the useless wings of a penguin. "How're you feeling?" He asked about her day's illness second, trapping her into treating it as an invention.

"Who was it?"

"He wouldn't say."

"What sort . . ." she began. "Was he English?"

"He spoke English."

"I don't mean that."

"If you're asking whether it was his first language . . ." but she only half listened.

Suddenly it all made sense: the hints Himji had given; the boastful threats Tony had accidentally used but refused to explain. She should not have needed his call to convince her that he could be in real danger.

For a fortnight she had felt increasing guilt that she had not seen him since the night at the Fig Tree, had not even phoned to thank him. Now, when he needed her help she had been out, amusing herself.

She dialled his party headquarters. The bell rang a long time. She couldn't believe it was empty. Without intending to be offensive or even being particularly busy they might not answer. It was these small things that people should not find irritating . . . but she stopped the lecture.

Often they answered keenly and carefully, showing the new skill they had mastered. Henry Burch had once told her of a student, who as well as taking his degree had taught himself to type and use the telephone, saying it seriously, listing achievements which were not very different.



"Hallo, who's there?"

"Could I speak to Mr. Ndolo?"

"Hold on, please."

There was a pause.

"Hallo hallo."

"Yes?"

"Please hold on."

"I am."

There was half a minute of silence, not even the sound of the receiver going down, then distant voices as if other people had come into the office.

"Hallo."

"Yes."

"If you will hold on I will look for him."

Presently she redialled the number. She was surprised to hear it ring, showing that the receiver had been put down.

"Hallo."

It was the same voice and she felt tired to have to start again

"I want to speak to Mr. Ndolo. Is he there?"

"He is at Legy Co."

"Are you sure? I didn't think they were sitting."

"Yes, I am sure."

But of course he wasn't. They didn't use the language in the same way. He might be sure or he might not. It was you who couldn't be.

To reach the corridor from her small office she had to cross the foot of Robinson's. She didn't care. Robinson had had enough for today, wouldn't risk questioning her so that with elaborate politeness she could ask permission to go to the lavatory. As soon as she opened her door he called.

"Come here a moment, will you, Heather?"

There was something unusual in his voice, as if it was he for once who was going to be angry.

"Did you see this letter?"

She stood at his desk, watching his soft hands holding it.

"I found it at the bottom of my pile."

"Is that the one from Fairchild?"

"It's the one which happens to mention that our New York Director of Programmes is to visit us in ten days," he said with elaborate sarcasm.

"I forget exactly." Her attention was caught by a curious object on his desk, a block of paper only an inch wide but six inches long. Some words were printed at the top and she read upside-down, "Scribbling Pad For Narrow Minded Bastards." It was a joke for Robinson to offer his friends.

"Heather, will you please bring letters like this to my immediate attention."

"I put it out for you on Friday."

"At the bottom of my pile."

She could see now that it was alarm he was moved by. "I don't remember."

"And you've drafted answers to two others but not to this one. Were you busy on Friday?"

She was shocked at how easily fright broke up his careful benevolence, showing the mean thoughts he must all the time be concealing

"How should I know it was so important?"

He took off his spectacles and stared at her. She had said something so ignorant that he did not know where to start to explain.

She said, "There were only five others."

"Seven," he said.

"Seven," she said and walked away, out into the corridor, down by the lift to the street.

The clouds had cleared and the sun was hot. She walked on the sunny side, letting it warm her arms and face. There were smells of roasting coffee and baking bread and once of garlic from a restaurant kitchen. She walked slowly, surprised by a feeling of happiness to be here. She must forget Robinson. It wouldn't be hard, now that she had work to do, which would leave no time for any anxiety except that she should do it well.

The party office was a low cluster of huts on a murram road in a location. She hesitated at the door, peering in. The entrance hall was a six foot square of whitewashed walls, hung with photos of Ndolo—Ndolo dressed in the robes of an Egyptian university which had given him an honorary degree, Ndolo lifted shoulder high at a meeting, Ndolo in a lounge suit speaking into a microphone. They were mostly in sepia, their glasses dusty and sometimes cracked so that they seemed like family relics from the twenties but when she looked closely they were all recent. There were photos of Itiro and others, but fewer.

From the entrance some old streamers stretched over the white walls where they didn't reach the roof into back rooms. Much of the coloured paper had been worn away, leaving only grey string, and the rest had concertinaed and collected dust.

Doors opened from this hall and in a room to the right several Africans were arguing loudly, two sitting on the table with their backs to each other, the rest out of sight. They didn't notice her.

Because they were preoccupied she turned through an open doorway to her left and found a small African at a desk doing nothing. It was surprising to find him sitting here alone, with the loud noise of the Africans arguing across the hall.

"I'm looking for Ndolo."

"He is not here."

He went past her and stood at the office entrance, looking up and down the yellow murram road. A bibi sat in the sunlight at a basin, washing clothes. A goat raised its head from grazing off the bare murram and stared.

"He comes and he goes," the small African said.

"You're sure he's not in one of the other rooms?"

"I will see," he said, as if it was the first time he had thought of it. After a minute he came back and said, "He is visiting Mr. Itiro."

Itiro's office was off Rudolf Street, in a sand coloured block which might have looked fresh ten years ago but had more likely had this drab appearance from the day it was finished. She went down a passage between the dark hole of a dealer in empty bottles and a dry cleaner's show window with sun-faded cardboard notices, to a flight of stairs. The stairs were so narrow that she began to doubt if they could be the main entrance to such a large building, though there were doors with notices. She had to bend and peer to read these in the darkness. They were like the front doors of cheap houses with latches and four square panes of frosted glass. On the third floor she read, "Washington Itiro Ltd. Agency for Commercial Employments".

Inside she was at once in a room crowded with Africans. She had not expected this for there had been none coming or going on the stairs. They stood thickly round the door and only the two nearest turned to stare, not hostilely but with steady curiosity. It was like the staring of people watching some entertainment, a little open mouthed, waiting for what it will do next. It was several seconds before she noticed the smell.

It was more concentrated than she had ever smelt before, heavy and damp and sweet. She thought it would make her sick and stood still, swallowing, hoping the spasm wouldn't come, white in the face, she knew, and giddy but still able to stand. There wasn't anywhere much to fall.

Gradually it went and she could see again, past the two staring Africans, between the backs of black curly heads. It was really two rooms, this one the waiting room, divided by a narrowing where a wall had been removed from Itiro's office beyond. But there seemed no real distinction for as many Africans were waiting there.

They came and went from benches along the walls to stand near his desk or actually sit in front of it without apparent reason or order. At any moment it was never clear which of them he was interviewing or whether he was interviewing any

of them or reading papers on his desk. Presently Heather moved forward and sat on one of the benches.

Here she could see better. She could hear that even while Itiro was glancing about his desk, turning papers and reading them, hunting for others, he went on talking, sometimes in his own Abaluja language, sometimes in Swahili, only occasionally setting his glasses on the end of his nose and squinting over them, as if discovering with surprise to whom he was speaking. Sometimes he spoke sharply in English to his wife, looking sideways towards a corner of the room but not at her.

His wife sat at a second desk. She was another reason why Itiro was unlikely in the end to win the power struggle, because she came from Johannesburg and never troubled to speak an East African language or hide that she thought them uncivilised.

She reminded Heather of an illustration of a nanny from the Deep South. Her great bare upper arms spread heavily as soon as they emerged from her blue print dress. She wore a small straw hat with pink flowers. As she bent over the desk top her bosom occasionally brushed the papers.

She continuously opened letters in a despairing way, not working from one pile to another but feeling about the desk with her big pink palmed hands for the next while she went on reading the last. When, without looking, she had opened it she let her hands put it down on top of the one she was reading although it was clear how much this interrupted and annoyed her. All the time as she read and fumbled she kept up a low grumble of complaint.

"Here's an invitation to speak at Thika yesterday."

"That's right." Itiro stroked his beard between his finger and thumb, as if to encourage it to come to a firm point but it remained a curly growth around his chin.

"How d'yer mean, that's right? You din go."

"Why wasn't it opened sooner?"

"Don' blame me, honey; you had this lot in your pocket three days."

After half an hour Heather despaired of discovering how to qualify for an interview and sat in front of his desk. No one protested or seemed surprised. Itiro straightened himself as if to display efficiency but he had become involved in a discussion with his wife.

"I haven't got it."

"You went there last, honey."

"Perhaps it's in the lock."

"You should know, you had it."

He opened several of his drawers stirring the contents softly with his small black hands. She had often noticed what gentle hands they had, how they took things you offered them softly.

"Did I not give it back to you?"

"You did not. Gee, I'm about bursting."

"May I suggest you go and look?"

"And have to come all the way back?"

It seemed not to occur to them to send one of the waiting Africans and Heather wondered if she should offer to go. While Mrs. Itiro quarrelled she did not stop her regular opening of the letters and the heavy frown stayed on her face as she laboriously read them.

At the far end of the waiting room, near the entrance, there was a stir. Three new Africans had come in, wearing suits and loud pale ties. They were being kept there by several others who, it now seemed, were officials. They argued and shouted, then laughed.

All round her they began to talk fast in Swahili. Everyone in the room had something to say except Itiro who sat still, staring ahead as if waiting for the noise to stop. It was a new position and had more dignity than she had expected. Presently she heard someone near Mrs. Itiro say, "They are waiting for his statement."

"They want your statement, honey," Mrs. Itiro said. She stood up, as if there was no need to quarrel any more because this had conclusively proved her point and moved sideways into a passage. She was heavily pregnant. Heather heard her

open what must have been the lavatory door, only a few feet into the passage.

"I told them to come back at eleven," Itiro said, in a loud authoritative voice. Unexpectedly it stopped the talking and the three journalists went out. Heather was even more surprised to see that Itiro's gold watch on the gold strap on his thin black wrist said five past eleven.

Instead of starting to write the statement he now seemed much more relaxed and for the first time gave her his full attention. "Time, that is what we do not have enough of. Do you know how the Chinese say it when you tell them there is plenty of time: 'less than you think.' " He didn't ask her why she had come, as if he might be uncertain whether he had invited her.

Suddenly she was angry with him, angry with all of them for the way they played at politics and did not understand that they were real and dangerous. Surely they could see that no one would trust them as long as they behaved like this.

"Your statement," she said. "Shouldn't you be writing it?"

"Do you think so?"

"That's what you said. It's after eleven."

"No no, Miss Heather. They are stupid impulsive fellows. Next time I will tell them I said twelve o'clock and they will go away quite happy. They only want to make a noise and show what big journalists they are. This evening I shall be telling them I have meant twelve midnight for my statement. Today I shall not be making a statement."

She said, "Could I speak to you?"

"Of course, Miss Heather."

As soon as she said it they all began to watch and listen. Even Mrs. Itiro, coming back from the passage, seemed to have heard and be watching her.

"Is there somewhere more private?"

The idea that they were not in private seemed new to Itiro and he looked round, genuinely surprised, she thought, to see so many people.

"I could send them away," he said, but not hopefully.

"Isn't there a quieter room?"

He stood and she followed him into the same passage. The lavatory door was on the right and they passed it towards a far door but he stopped and didn't go in.

He began to explain to her how right she was, as if to reassure her that she had not insulted him. "They are my friends but to you they are strangers. You are very wise not to tell secrets in front of strangers." As he talked all her attention became fixed on the lavatory door which she could see past his shoulder. Twice she was sure it moved. Surely Mrs. Itiro would have locked it. She went past him and gave it a hard push so that it swung open. It was empty.

He stopped talking and watched her. He didn't comment but she had an idea that he was impressed, not as a European would have been by her unbalanced excitement, but by her good sense.

"I want to find William. Do you know where he is?"

"Miss Heather, in the words of your Bible, I am not my friend Ndolo's keeper."

"It's not my Bible," she said impatiently. After that it took her a moment to control herself, worried by not understanding why she had said it. "I was told he had gone to see you."

"Mr. Ndolo is a man of rapid movements. He moves so fast that few can keep pace with him. Even his policies . . ."

She realised that they were having one of their quarrels. If only they would grow up . . . "You mean he's been here and gone? You mean he didn't come here?"

"It is true that we had some conversation three, four hours ago."

"And he left."

"He is not here now, Miss Heather. As you have seen we are not even hiding him in our toilet."

"Where did he go?"

"If you were to attend today's meeting at Kiambu, or today's



meeting at Machakos. Tonight, by one or two in the morning he may be at the party office. That is where we are expecting him, but that is not to say he will come."

"He rang me," she said, but she was uncertain now whether she should trust him. "I don't know what he wants."

"Is that so?"

"I think he may be in danger."

He didn't answer but lowered his chin, adjusted his glasses to the end of his nose and stared over them.

In the street she thought she might faint. Her head began to spin and whiteness came in front of her eyes. She leant against the dry cleaner's window. She bent her head towards her waist, but not too low in case they saw and took her away.

Perhaps it was the new pills—or hunger; she had had no breakfast. Or the crowded office, half holding her breath against the damp smell. Slowly it cleared and she could see again. But when she tried to walk her legs shivered violently and she stepped back to the shop window.

She stayed for several minutes, hoping no one would come from Itiro's office and recognise her, then went slowly along the fronts of the shops to a snack bar and ordered coffee. When the waiter tried to pour in hot milk the sight of the skinny secretion made her want to retch. She forced herself to drink, and it was bitter and reviving and hot all the way to her stomach.

She drove to Kiambu. It was the lunch hour but she hadn't time for that. She drove up and down the curving tarmac hills under the midday sun. First there was green forest, then coffee. The rows of dark green bushes stretched over the tops of rises into the country beyond. Someone had planted bougainvillea by the roadside, trailers of pink and red and mauve, making a thin hedge. In Nairobi you expected it but out here it was surprising, the only bright colour among all these different greens.

It was one when she came to the boma. At first she thought the offices were shut then a young red haired European was

locking a hut door, his heavy back in khaki bush shirt towards her.

"Is there a meeting this afternoon?"

"Not that I know," he said, still with his back to her. "Beats me," he said, but it was about the lock. Presently he turned towards her for the first time. He had freckles and a wide squashed face as if when a child he had received a mallet blow which had compressed his features. "What meeting would this be?"

"A political meeting."

"The K.L.M.P.N.C.?"

"That's right."

"We fixed that lot on Friday."

"Fixed . . ." she began.

"Got 'em on a technical point. Application for a licence submitted with insufficient notice."

She drove to Machakos, faster now back into the city, past the police hut with the park of smashed cars, the new Ismaeli mosque, like a cubist fairy palace, the Goan Institute, grey and respectable, caught for a time in the returning lunch hour traffic, Robinson too she supposed, free at last beyond the concrete factories and go-downs of Enterprise Road.

She drove down the long reach of tarmac to Athi River, the same road she had driven in the moonlight with Dev and Zool only twelve hours before.

Beyond the first range of hills she turned on to the murrum and drove fast over the stoney yellow road, gathering speed till she let a wheel into a deeper hole and the violent jolt made her slow. She kept her eyes screwed up against the bright glare of the sun. Perhaps it was this which was making her head ache.

Presently there was a lorry in front. She came quickly into its dust, hoping to pass at once, but at the last moment hadn't the courage to drive forward into the yellow cloud which completely hid the road ahead. For five minutes she followed closely, her windows shut, the dust and grit swirling past,

smelling and breathing it, then fell back and drove impatiently three hundred yards behind, still coming into patches which hadn't drifted or settled. The bushes for twenty yards to windward were covered in an orange film.

Half a mile before the town she knew that they hadn't been fixed on a technical point here. Thick streams of Africans were moving along the roadside, going in and out of a gateway. Most seemed to be leaving and she realised that it had been a lunch time meeting.

They stood aside to let her in and she drove along a grey earth track. She could see the meeting in the field's far corner and turned towards a small group of cars to park. Too late she saw that they were three police Peugeots and a police Land Rover.

European policemen in khaki jackets and shorts stood beside them, speaking into wireless transmitters. In the back of the Land Rover six African police in blue sweaters and maroon tin helmets sat in two rows hunched under its canvas roof, their rifles sloping between their knees over their shoulders. They all watched her.

The Europeans stopped using their wirelasses and she saw one touch another's arm to show him. They watched her all the time she went in a slow bumping arc behind them. Thirty yards beyond she parked her car by itself, only then seeing other cars at the opposite side of the meeting below a tree.

An African was still speaking, from a small wooden stand like a rustic model of the traffic police stands in Nairobi, but from the way his audience was dwindling she guessed it was a vote of thanks. It wasn't William. Presently he had finished, the stand was empty and she saw a group which had been waiting round it move away towards the cars.

She hurried forward, crossing in front of the police cars, skirting the thickest part of the crowd which still surrounded the empty stand. For a moment she lost the group, then she was ahead of them and they were coming towards her. They moved in a spread out line, William at the centre.

He strode forward and though those next to him could keep up, she noticed that others further out were having to hurry, dodging and pushing through the crowd. Close behind him others were following at a shambling trot. He ignored them all.

He walked with his chest out, talking loudly, still excited from his speech. He spoke to right, then left, without pause, catching the applause with the corner of his eye but listening for no reply. Suddenly she could not understand why she had come, wished she could be swallowed up and hidden. She felt a terrible shame that she should be offering anything, even help he might need, to this strutting little man. She turned and began to push back but she was too late.

"Hallo Heather." As soon as he saw her he turned towards her, changing the direction of the whole moving group.

"You have come to hear me in action?"

She shook her head but couldn't answer. She wondered why he wanted to do this, then knew that she was providing some refined addition to his vanity. They had all halted now, waiting for William to tell them how to treat her.

"It was a good meeting, yes?"

She couldn't even nod or shake her head. Then they were moving again and she was walking beside him, the others hurrying and trotting all round. She couldn't think how it had happened and knew that she must turn and run away. But how could she know whether this was a feeling she should trust or some unconquered horror from her childhood? How could she run when she knew it might be from fear?

"You will drive with us?" he said.

"I've got my own car."

After that she became sure that she had interrupted his triumph. He no longer talked and seemed glad to reach his car and settle himself in the front seat to be driven. He was still puffed up with conceit, but looking ahead, not paying attention to her. She stood helplessly by the side door. She said, "Did you ring me?"

"Did I ring you?" He still didn't look at her. For a moment she thought he had genuinely forgotten in the excitement of the day. She was aware of the five black faces of his party men peering up at her over the back seat. Crushed in like that they seemed to be all big face and teeth and diseased brown eyes rolled up towards her.

"No, Heather, I have not rung you."

It was four when she came back to the office. She went quickly across the foot of Robinson's to her own, not looking to see if he was there, aware of his grey shape at the desk. She shut her door and sat down.

There were letters to sort and she made herself open some. She found it impossible to make sense of them even when she forced herself to say their words aloud. She rested a moment, staring at a photograph of a poached buck. It lay on its side, still and dead, a wide raw curve of flesh where the wire snare had rubbed. It seemed composed, as if at the end it hadn't struggled any more but lain down quietly on its side to die. A disembodied hand reached into the photograph, the fingers touching its ribs. Her door had moved a foot before she saw it, her mouth opened to scream but no noise came. It was Robinson.

"Someone rang for you."

She kept still, no idea what it meant or why he said it.

"I put his name in your diary."

She saw it then, open in front of her, in Robinson's careful sloping writing. "Mr. Marlow. Nbi 87532."

"Thank you."

"Heather."

She kept looking down, reading the name and number, sure now what was coming.

"I think we should get some red 'Urgent' labels."

She was utterly confused, had again the childhood feeling that it was all a game they were playing with her.

"The sort you can pin to letters."

"We've got some," she began. "Green . . ." but the idea of answering him seriously seemed too awful.

"That's fine," Robinson said. "Green?" he said. "They'll do fine"

She understood now. Tonight he could not bear to go home with the disagreement unsettled. It was his own goodness and kindness he was worried about, needed to know she still believed in.

## Chapter Sixteen

THERE was rain in the night, not heavy and broken like the rainy season when the violent showers succeeded each other all night—just a single light rain, starting as she went to bed and ceasing long before morning. Perhaps it was this which gave her her best sleep for nights; or perhaps it was her complete exhaustion, too exhausted to care whether she slept or not. She hadn't dared take another pill, not after such a day.

The sun shone now. In the cool fresh morning it seemed a different country. The earth in her flower beds was damp and there were raindrops on the grass, shining in the sunlight. High up in the blue sky, there was thin cirrus cloud which you didn't often see in Nairobi. Usually just the shapeless masses of white and grey cumulus. The rain shone in the trees too. It was like a morning on the farm and made her remember how different it had been from Nairobi. The air was perfectly still, the branches of the trees only moving when small birds flew among them.

Everything had changed colour in the night. The yellow drive was dark chocolate. The grass had lost its pale brown and seemed already greener. One of the lilies in her border had opened. Its six inch sky blue head of tiny perfect flowers made her catch her breath. There it was, standing quietly in her border, and until this moment she hadn't noticed it.

They met at the Coffee Bar. "I'm a car salesman," Tony said. He grinned and made her sit on the wall seat, at the twisted-iron table in Festival of Britain style, now reaching Kenya seven years later, while he stood at the counter and bought coffee.

"Let me show you this fine 1945 model, madam. Ninety thousand miles, madam, is nothing for a car of this quality.

No madam, I'm afraid we can't offer seven hundred for your pre-war Austin. The fact is, madam, the market is a bit depressed in pre-war Austins, just for the moment—Man, it makes you vomit."

Just the same she thought he was enjoying it, grateful to have found anyone who wanted him. He might be good at it. His obvious honesty, so that it was difficult for him to tell the smooth lies of the professional, might make him valuable.

He was wearing a suit which she thought new till she noticed a missing button. She hadn't often seen Tony in a suit. His thick sunburned neck made his buttoned cotton collar seem frail, as if at any moment it might swell in anger and burst out. From the bulges above his elbows he was wearing the shirt sleeves rolled inside his jacket and perhaps it was this that held up the jacket sleeves so that he showed a lot of thick sandy haired wrist. Or perhaps it was a suit he had had at school.

"They're all the same. You see all these different bastards walking around and you think some are generous and some mean. It's not true, man. They all want to sell you something for more than it's worth and buy something for less than it's worth." It had been a revelation to him.

His unexpected cheerfulness made the careful things she had prepared seem pointless. She wanted only to sit with him and listen to him telling her about the people who came to buy his cars.

The bar was filling now. Suited men from offices, out for breakfast which they had missed at home, an expensive Indian with an American girl, an actor from the city rep, reading a book. Through the open street door a Land Rover, "A. C. Greenside. Safaris", in its back two elephant tusks, the yellow points sticking up above the sides.

"Did I ever tell you how Dicky Wills and I had to jump for it?"

She gave her head a single quick shake.

"There we were, lumbering along, pretty close to this river,



each carrying one of these damned tusks and suddenly I realised that the lumbering I could hear behind me wasn't Dicky, it was a couple of rhino about ten yards away, coming straight for us." He gave a short laugh.

"Man, I can remember every step to the bank and each one seemed to take about five minutes. I can remember every bloody branch I had to push out of the way and the feel of the tusk as I let it slip down my back. When we got there it was a fifteen foot drop to the river. I remember noticing we were both in the air at the same moment only Dicky was about three feet lower. And thinking how God damn funny if I land on the back of an old croc."

She smiled at him, but though he went on remembering it he didn't say any more, didn't tell her, as he once had, how he and Dicky had been so weak that they'd had to help each other out of the water. Perhaps it was something he had never meant to tell her.

It was time for him to go and they walked together, through the warm sunny streets to his showroom window.

"Sometimes it hurts," Tony said. "They bring in some damned old ruin they're a bit proud of. I don't like to see their faces when I tell them what it's worth."

She nodded.

"It doesn't hurt Gayfield," Tony said. "He enjoys it. Makes him feel a real man."

"Who's Gayfield?"

"A little puffed up shit," Tony said. "Our sales manager."

They stood in the shade of a concrete overhang a few yards before the sheets of plate glass, already in sight of a shining violet bonnet.

"Thank you, Tony."

"We must do it again," Tony said. "Now we're both in the same boat."

He faced her and held one of her hands. "You're looking better," he said, as if he had only now found the confidence.

Then she knew it was the bedside manner he had only now

brought himself to use. Something he had planned, but put off till the last moment. It turned the whole quiet friendly meeting into a resolution to be kind to her.

"I don't need looking after, Tony." But she wished she had had patience to wait and see.

He shrugged his shoulders, let her hand fall, looked away down the street at the cars crossing in the bright sunlight.

"If you're doing it for me, Tony, I'd rather you didn't."

He shrugged his shoulders again. "I may want to," he said. At once he walked away. Ten yards along the pavement at the wide glass doors he waved once to her, not smiling, then went in.

Probably he was angry that his charity had been discovered, obstinately pretending it was not charity. Or had he embarrassed himself by saying something he meant? If only she knew.

## Chapter Seventeen

"HALLO," she said, but there was no one there. She stood by the bookcase, holding the receiver, looking through her sitting room to her garden, hot and still in the afternoon sun. She heard the button rattle and it was Tony.

"I should like to speak to you."

"Of course, Tony."

"Would tonight be convenient?"

"Yes, Tony." She couldn't keep the laughter out of her voice at how pompous he was being.

"I'll be round at eight," he said. He didn't laugh. There was something strange about the way he was speaking as if with difficulty, as if he might be very angry.

"Is there anything wrong?"

"That's what I have to find out," he said and rang off.

She was near to tears then, that he could demand to see her in this dramatic way, then leave her six hours to wonder why.

She lay on her bed to rest but that was absurd. She imagined one interview after another. Sometimes they became fantastic, and once, with her eyes shut she was struggling to keep the door closed against him, never quite able to push it enough to turn the key. She sat up, thinking of the night ahead.

For four nights now she had slept without pills, not all night but for several hours towards morning when she had exhausted herself with reading. There was no chance of this tonight. She didn't dare take the new pills again. She dressed quickly, hunted in her bag for the old prescription, ran out without finding it, anxious to reach the shops before they shut.

Perhaps they were anyway shut on Saturday afternoon. She drove fast to the European part of the town. Delamere Avenue was empty in the hot sunlight, only a few European cars

stopping for petrol on their way through, and one or two Africans on the pavements as if they had strayed here by mistake, staring at shop windows. She drove up Stewart Street and down Sadler Street, past two chemists but their doors showed grey blinds.

Government Road was different. Here, under the arcades at the old end, were thick crowds of Africans and Asians, walking in family groups. A party of teenage Africans in tartan shirts and black jeans leant against a pillar, whistled to friends across the street. She couldn't see one European. It was strange to see this place she associated with shopping European wives, baskets on arms, polished cars against the curb, occupied by these different people. She was pleased to find how she liked it.

She walked under the arcade and at first these shops too seemed closed, then she saw that several of their padlocks were hanging undone. Peering through the glass doors she saw Asians moving in the half light among the counters. She found a chemist and went in.

There were two of them. She had imagined they would be counting or rearranging stock, but they did not seem to be doing much except set straight a toothbrush here, flick off some dust there. She guessed that their shop was their life and there was nothing at home to interest them more.

She hunted again in her handbag, but it didn't matter. "Do you have Sofomol tablets?" This had been the trade name.

The small dark Indian shook his head. He had gone behind the counter and was so short that only his head appeared in a gap between a rack of dark glasses in pink plastic frames and a pile of babyfood tins.

"I'm sure that was the name."

He called rapidly to the other in Gujarati.

"We are not selling without prescription."

She tried to look surprised but she had already guessed.

"I've been having them for months."

He just stood there, shaking his head, smiling a little now.

"Surely in an emergency."

But the more she let him see her anxiety the more certain she made it that he would not give her them.

"Suppose we are selling you and next morning you have taken whole bottle—pooff," he said, rolling his big brown eyes to the ceiling. "Police are coming and we are losing licence. All for one bottle of pills—very unprofitable business."

She liked the simple way he told her what he expected her to do, not trying to make her ashamed like the silly girls in a European chemist.

"You will have to see your doctor."

"How can I on a Saturday afternoon?" but she wondered whether she should try. She thought of coming to him across the golf course and the way he would look at her with a conceited triumph he would not trouble to hide.

"Have you anything else?"

"Oh yes, we are having many things." At once he was keen to sell. "You wait. I show."

She bought the first he brought without looking at them. He was disappointed, a little hurt, left holding the money and the three or four other tubes he had wanted to show her. She drove slowly home, the slower the better now.

At last he came and she didn't hear him, was in the kitchen, setting a tray for Sunday, surprised to look up and see him by the sofa, half turned away from her, holding a magazine he had lifted. He didn't read it but glanced first at its front then back as if making a scornful survey of such an obvious trap.

"Hallo, Tony."

"Hallo." He still didn't turn, then tossed it on to the sofa.

After that he stared at her. It was the same melodramatic act and she had to laugh, going past him to the drink cupboard. "Whisky?" She didn't feel like laughing.

There was no answer and when she turned he was still staring at the place where she had stood in the kitchen doorway. She carried the glass to him but he wouldn't take it.

"What's the matter, Tony?"

"Perhaps you'd better tell me."

"Tony, don't be absurd. You come here like a cross between a judge and an executioner . . ." She stopped, worried by the way he made her talk. She must say things slowly and simply, the way he would understand. She must not tease him as she felt an increasing temptation to when he was most ponderous and could forgive it least.

"You've nothing to tell me?"

She said, "There's nothing I'm ashamed of, if that's what you mean." She drew the curtains and sat on the arm of the sofa. She crossed to the cupboard and poured herself a whisky.

"Where were you on Tuesday, man?" He was angry now, staring hard, only stopping once to glance for the drink she had put near him.

She guessed then, remembered the squash faced district officer at Kiambu—or more likely the police cars at Machakos. She said quietly, "You can't talk to me like this, Tony."

"I can."

She shook her head, suddenly a little giddy.

"I've been making a few inquiries . . ."

"You haven't any right to make inquiries."

He was dark in the face, more angry because he had no answer. "Don't you think that liking someone . . ."

But she knew she must protect him from this new absurdity. "Tony, it was a mistake. Can't we leave it at that?"

"You're telling me it was," he said, but she had stopped him.

He moved to the open veranda door, the dark night in her garden, the crickets singing under the trees. She went to the cupboard and carried the whisky to his empty glass but he refused. She sat on the sofa, turning the magazine he had dropped, then watched him standing with rounded shoulders, as he did when he was angry or unhappy.

"If I thought you were having an affair," he began with slow drama.

"What would you do?" she said. She was impatient that he should start again.

"Man, I might kill you."

She laughed at that but while she laughed felt herself give a single heavy shiver. It started at her shoulders and ran down her back.

She said, "Tony, I'm not."

"All right, you're not," he said, "but that's what it looks like. That's what everyone says. That's what my friends say."

"I don't care what they say."

He shook his head.

"Do you care what my friends say?"

He didn't answer.

"Who are these friends?"

He said, "It doesn't work."

"What doesn't work?"

He wouldn't answer, only shook his head. She was worried by his silence, had to remember that it was based on the same weak arguments because they were all he knew. There had been a time years ago when he had known better, when she had trusted his strong silence.

"Tony, it's got to work."

He wouldn't answer.

"Don't you see they're children. Him especially. He needs advice, sympathy."

"He's a child, all right," he said bitterly. "A vicious brat."

"He wants affection," she said. "Oh, I don't mean that. Just someone to persuade him that every European doesn't want him shot. Someone who'll talk to him seriously, not shout uhuru and applaud every mistaken thing he says. His own people are too frightened and we're too angry."

"That's what he wants," he said. "All of them shouting and cheering."

"He wants his bottom kicking," she said.

He stared at her, astonished that she should use his words, for a moment shocked into the idea that she might mean

them, then small eyed with anger that she should mimic him.

It wasn't easy after that to let him finish as he had planned, with some dramatic, but, now that he had spoken his mind, less angry warning. Presently she managed it.

"Think it over, Pony."

With a great effort she didn't answer, and when he left and held out his hand, even shook it without laughing.

After that she drank two more whiskies and played some jazz loudly on her gramophone and went into the kitchen and took the blue china coffee pot she had bought for her new house in Nairobi and smashed it on the red tiles. There were a lot more pieces than she expected. They spread round her feet in every direction, under the legs of the electric cooker, against the enamel base of the refrigerator. There was even one, she noticed, beyond the doorway on her sitting room parquet. Now I shall cry, she thought, but for some reason she couldn't.



## Chapter Eighteen

"I'm sorry, Mother, I forgot."

"That's all right, dear. Come to tea instead?"

She hesitated, thinking that because it was different it might be less dangerous, looking down at her small hand on the bookshelf, then away with irritation out of the window at the overcast sky, remembering her grey face this morning. "I've a meeting at six. It'd be a rush."

"Of course, dear. Shall we see you next Sunday?"

"I think so."

"Let us know if there's anything we can do."

"Of course."

As soon as she had finished she knew how much she had expected to go, not wanting it, just aware of it as a landmark she would presently reach. It left her with the empty day to fill.

She moved about the house, tidying her bedroom, washing her underclothes, hanging them out to dry, ironing a blouse. She shook her bright orange cushions and set them symmetrically on the chairs and sofa. She swept up the pieces of coffee pot. It was ten o'clock. She stood on her veranda.

The day reminded her of England. It had that hopeless greyness, grey in the west moving slowly forward, the whole sky darkening, then the rain. In England it had often stayed like that for days on end. You didn't feel that here. Even when the dark cloud was coming you knew that twenty minutes later you'd look up and the sun would be breaking through. Even when the rain fell it wasn't steady day-long rain and always you were expecting it to stop and the sky to brighten. In England she had sometimes thought she would die of despair at the half light grey days . . . It would still be easy to ring and say she was coming.

The lunch she had invented could be cancelled. They wouldn't suspect. They weren't suspicious people. Her breakdown, the cutting of the cattle on their farm, these things had come to them as shocking surprises. Perhaps when they came to die this too would astonish them. She went back into the house, took out some blue material and the paper dress pattern and spread them on the carpet. She worked steadily, forcing herself to go on when she made a wrong cut. She would finish it even if it looked like hell. At twelve o'clock she rolled it into a bundle and drove to Karen.

Her mother came on to the drive to meet her. "What a nice surprise, dear."

"I got the date wrong."

They kissed, touching cheeks softly, and went in. The first person she saw in the sitting room was her brother Charles.

There was no reason why he shouldn't be here. It was easy for him to drive the twenty-eight miles for Sunday lunch and he sometimes did. She knew that wasn't why he was here today.

Perhaps it was the way he hadn't come on to the drive to meet her; or because she couldn't hear his children and guessed that he had come alone. Perhaps it was the way he and her father were standing silently in here, so that she knew they had been talking about her.

She was so sure it was a trap that she hesitated at the doorway, wondering if even now she should go away, then her mother was behind her and she stepped in.

"Hallo, Po."

"Hallo, Charles."

It was like Charles to be the one to speak, to put up the front of normality because he knew for what worthy reasons they had been conspiring about her. Her father couldn't speak yet, had more honesty.

After that they were watching her, noticing how her hand shook when she took the drink, how she talked too much, any stupid thing to fill the silences, till she became breathless.

Her mother didn't talk, sitting upright on the edge of the sofa, her head sometimes bent to her knitting pattern. In this position the back of her neck seemed thin so that for the first time Heather knew how she would look as an old woman. Charles didn't talk much except once at lunch when he corrected them solemnly and at length about the build-up of coffee prices. Her father talked sometimes but it was less conversation than the gentle inconclusive pursuit of ideas of his own.

After lunch she slipped away and walked by herself to the end of the garden, down forest paths to the valley. They hadn't meant her to go but had failed to think how to stop her. There were heavy clouds still and only occasional moments of hot sun. When she came back they were still there, Charles a little impatient she thought, as if he hadn't meant the tiresome business to take so long.

Tea came and they sat with the small plates of sugar cakes on their knees, her mother pouring, first the four cups, then hot water into the pot. She rang the silver bell for more. When the boy had brought it Charles said, "We've been thinking, Po, wouldn't it be a good idea to have a break from Nairobi?"

She stared at him, not letting him escape for a second from the way he made her despise him.

"Isn't it getting on top of you?"

She knew how little he cared, how he was doing it not because he was kind or warm but out of a sense of moral tidiness, because he could not bear to leave a failing exposed. They were too alike for him to hide this.

"Mother and father suggest you come here for a few days. Or Priscilla says you're welcome with us."

"What about my job?"

"Does that really matter?"

"Of course it does." Surely they could understand how it had to matter.

Her father said, "Things are a bit unsettled with this strike.

It worries your mother and me to think of you in town alone."

She tried not to answer.

"Wouldn't it be a good moment to take a holiday?"

She was astonished that they could make such a suggestion. "Don't you see it would be the worst possible moment." But when she looked her mother and father seemed genuinely puzzled—not Charles. Charles could understand if he chose.

"You're looking rather tired, dear," her mother said.

"I'm not tired, Mother."

"You're quite sure?"

"To put it plainly," Charles said, "Father and mother think you're getting a bit involved."

"Who gave them that idea?"

"No one gave it them," Charles said, sharply, so that she knew she had guessed right. "It could hardly be more obvious."

Her father said, "Heather, you've been away a long time. This country isn't the place it used to be."

"But it's you who don't realise that," she said.

Her father shook his head, not understanding or fully listening. "It isn't safe now. There was a time when the African would thank you for helping him. Today he thinks it's his right."

"But it is," she said.

"Heather dear!" her mother said. She had stopped them at last, but she knew what it had cost her. Charles gave a short laugh, more a sneer.

Perhaps he noticed its ugly noise because he began gently, "Look, Po, why not try it for a few days, then see how you feel?"

"No, Charles."

"Darling, please think about it."

"I think about it all the time," she said, crying now, but more in anger at the way they had made her.

"Why not get well and strong first?"

"Mother's right."

"We won't keep you here. As soon as you feel you can face it you can go back."

She could only shake her head, sitting there small and tearful. She had always known, of course, that she was alone.

The storm came in over the hills, covering the valley with dark cloud. To the right the lightning flashed and there were several violent crashes of thunder but to the left across a hundred and fifty miles of Africa Kilimanjaro was clear in a small half circle of blue sky, a white topped molehill on the horizon. It didn't seem far, as if you might walk there in a day. It was for the view of Kilimanjaro that her parents had bought this house. They saw it about once a month.

The clouds grew black and the sitting room was in deep shadow. The rain came, in heavy sheets driven against the window by gusts of wind. They sat on through it, not talking now because there was nothing to say. They had got into positions from which there was no retreat, and she was sorry about this, feeling that it need not have happened. Gradually she was calmer and ready to drive back to Nairobi.

## Chapter Nineteen

SHE didn't sleep that night and in the morning she knew they had won, not for ever, but conclusively for the moment. She locked the house, gave Mwengo the key and drove north from Nairobi. At least she wouldn't tell them, watching them try to hide their satisfaction that they had been proved right.

At Thika she rang Robinson. Robinson had thought she was looking tired. Of course an early start was important to avoid the heat of the day. She was to come back only when she felt perfectly well, not a moment before. The arrangements for the Director of Programmes' visit were well ahead now and it only remained to deal with the work which had built up meanwhile.

The pretence amazed her. Already, because she was out of the office he was giving his performance, ignoring what she knew.

"Oh, that's good," she said and rang off.

She had heard his relief that he would not see her for several days. But not for long. As soon as she felt well and strong she would go back. When she thought of Robinson sitting in assured idleness she already wanted to go.

She drove through arid scrub land, dry and dusty in the hot morning sun. They'd had no rain here. Presently she could smell marigolds.

It wasn't a nice smell perhaps, strong and catlike. You didn't find it in Nairobi. Suddenly she was in her father's old Wolseley, returning from school for the holidays. You didn't find it on the long climb through the Kikuyu villages to the top of the escarpment. Then the swinging bends of the descent into the Rift Valley, the air at once warmer and after a mile there it was. It seemed a long time since she had smelt it and she

wished that she had found it sooner, thought it might have helped.

Gradually she was able to put into the car all there should have been. Her father, red necked from the sun, wearing a jungle-green hat, glad to be leaving the town he didn't understand. Her brother Charles in the mauve blazer and grey shorts and brown Homburg hat of his school uniform, not able to hide his excitement for the holidays, though he tried. Her mother, checking the things on her list they had forgotten. Those they had remembered filled the car and often her feet had been on rolls of barbed wire and their school trunks strapped above bags of meal. And clearest of all, herself, watching and recognising each new piece of the road, asking about the geese, the dogs, the horses, not able to wait for the full report of one before she asked about the next though she had known how they were laughing to hear her do it.

As soon as they were down in the Rift Valley they had reached a more real Africa, the dry yellow grass and thorn bushes, the little yellow tomatoes on grey stalks, the huge lump of Longanot coming nearer as the road climbed on to its shoulder. And the first animals: a giraffe raising its head from a thorn top to stare, some galloping zebra, a herd of tommies. Those had been the best fifty miles, the journey no longer an impossibly long interval between now and when they would arrive. Stifling hot in the car, the leather where the sun fell on it burning to touch, at last the turn from the main road and the steep climb two thousand feet to the farm. When the car was heavily loaded it had been exciting to see whether it would boil.

As soon as they had arrived she had run from room to room, seeing that everything was there. Often she had purposely left till last the place she really wanted to go, the stables. Another time she had run straight to them, and Trinda wasn't there and she had known at once what it meant and run back, full of bitterness that they should have understood so little—and then seen from the way they were watching her

a little fearfully that it was because they had understood that they had not dared tell her. She had cried loudly in her mother's lap, and later quietly in bed to herself because she did not want them to hear. She had imagined the frightened animal being led to the box, not understanding why she was being taken because she was not there to explain to her, knowing that something was wrong. How could they dare to comfort her.

It had been the horses she had come home for to the end, though she thought that once she had been excited to remember that Tony would be there too and they would ride together.

It was eleven before she came to Jubi and stopped in front of the thatched house above the boma, and Michael Wyatt came out holding bread in one hand and a cup of coffee in the other.

"Heather, how astonishing. Excuse this."

He gestured with the bread towards the coffee and she noticed as he came forward, smiling at her, wanting perhaps to kiss her but unsure how to go about it, drips of marmalade falling past his trousers into the grass.

"Great goings on. Just caught my trusted A.D.O. slinking away with the petty cash."

For a second Ethne Wyatt stood in the doorway, tall and white, in a pale dressing gown with a turban of green towel round her hair.

"If it isn't Heather, me luv," she said and disappeared.

Two small Wyatts, barefooted, in skirt-like garments of indeterminate sex, with milk and biscuit-coloured food spreading from their mouths, came out, running with the unsteadiness of young children, then standing staring up at her with round blue eyes, each gripping a handful of Michael's trousers at the knee. She wanted to warn them about the marmalade in the grass, then didn't want to warn them and bent and kissed them on their foreheads.

She had to do it to hide the tears which had come into her eyes, tears of relief to be among people who would not think



her a traitor. Only now when it was for a time over did she understand how tired the last eight months had made her.

The mountain was a black shape against the cloudless dawn. She thought it must change people to live always with this great presence above them, sometimes showing itself in astonishing beauty in the early morning—more often shut away behind cloud but still there, always there and not to be ignored. She dressed and went out into the fresh wet morning.

All round the Wyatts' house were shambas of maize, banana and sweet potatoes. They were soaked with dew and her slacks became drenched and her legs numb as she hurried over the soft red earth.

Everywhere the birds fluttered and chattered. Many were weaver birds, noisy and vulgar, the African sparrow. Then there were brown mouse birds with nine-inch tails and fluffed feathers as if they had just dried from a bath, sitting in the upper branches of sizal stems. Unexpectedly there was something owl sized and black at the top of a wattle tree. It seemed so solid and black and curiously shaped that she thought it might be a can or piece of cloth stuck up there, then it moved and gave a raucous cry and she knew it was a plumed eagle. It gave more cries of annoyance as she came near, and flapped away.

Though the birds were busy all round her it was quiet up here, the noises of the township which had begun at dawn, the crowing of cocks and shouting of children and honking of donkeys, left behind though she could still hear them distantly beyond and below the Wyatts' house. She could feel the good it was doing her.

That day, and on many others she drove with Michael round his district in his Land Rover, returning after dark, her eyes and clothes and whole skin covered with fine red dust, her body so shaken that she had no thought except a desire for sleep.

Michael was full of wonder at the things that went on in his district.

"Have a serious talk with that chap. Tell him cash boxes don't disappear from locked offices. Not in the Colonial Service."

"Did he expect you to believe that?"

"Not expect. They don't think that way. They keep trying things out. Some work, some don't."

"They must have a basic sense of honesty."

"About goats and cows. Why should that apply to cash boxes—especially British Government cash boxes?"

She might have thought him cynical if she had not understood that he was defending himself against other people's, perhaps even his own laughter at his own enthusiasm.

He was full of astonishment too at the things which went on in his home, looking up with wonder from the *New Statesman* as Ethne chased one of his children in at one door and out at another, flapping a newspaper at it. "How did they get here?"

One afternoon Heather went with Michael to some weddings. She had seen the invitations on his mantelpiece, among the empty match boxes, paperbacks with tea cup rings, open envelopes with the letters incompletely pushed back. Saturday was the day for weddings and on this Saturday Michael had invitations to three.

They took place, Michael said, in different places: the church, the bride's parents' house, the bridegroom's parents' house, the local school. It was important to calculate from the time of the ceremony which place they would have reached. Usually they concluded with a dance at the social club where guests paid.

They drove hard all afternoon, down miles of bumpy red tracks, in and out of deep green valleys, across little streams with women washing clothes. At the end of each new trail they came to a gathering, a hundred or two hundred people round a hut, and were led in with great politeness and given cups of pale sweet tea with hot milk. No, the bridal party unfortunately had not arrived but they would be only a few

minutes. They should have been here an hour ago. Most certainly they must wait.

So they waited and were offered more tea, and, plates of flat unsweetened cakes. She made herself eat these, brushing at the flies, trying not to think of dysentery. She made herself go into the small dark huts with their beaten can roofs, their stick and mud walls with bright upland flowers in the cracks. She had never before been in an African hut. She made herself sit on the wooden bench and not mind the continuous stares of the children who followed as far as each doorway and, she suddenly noticed, could be seen all round as dark eyes at the holes in the walls. It was late now and still they had not found a bride or bridegroom, but at any minute they must be coming. Meanwhile, would they like to see the farm?

Down the hillside, between the newly consolidated fields of beans and tea bushes, the strips of grass with four grazing cows. This was a prosperous farmer who employed two workmen. Back past the dance band tuning in a paddock. two drummers, a trumpeter and a tin whistler. It was the drumming they really enjoyed, an absorbed look on their faces as they beat the complicated rhythms. They none of them smiled, but played seriously, the trumpeter staring sideways with bulging eyes at the curious Europeans who passed.

Up from the green valley to the crowd in front of the hut. Would they come in for a cup of tea? Or there was stronger drink. Up here a different sort of dancing had begun, not the South American, American Negro mix-up—which they had already made into something of their own—a more primitive dance, the bald headed old women swaying and grunting.

They were so thickly crowded that it was hard to see its form. She could make out three galvanised buckets of tea in the centre. Round these they swayed closely, chanting and stamping. The movement went on without change or variation so that already she could imagine how mesmerising it could be, hour after hour. Presently a new old woman came with a tray of mugs and danced too, swaying the tray.

The dance became more excited, they lifted the empty mugs and held them above their heads. Bend the knees, thrust forward the, pelvis, grunt. They came in pairs, dancing in from the side, holding each other sideways, mugs raised, unexpectedly all howling in a strange wolf like way. At once she believed in witches. They were absurdly like the traditional toothless old women witches. The whole dance was like an overproduced *Macbeth*.

Mixed with it all was a curious coyness so that while they swayed and grunted they leered sideways at Michael and herself, continually aware that they were being watched.

Suddenly one of them was dancing in front of her, holding out a mug, full now, then lifting it above her head so that she expected her at any moment to spill the scalding tea over herself. Then, without ever consciously intending to, she was trying to dance too, imitating the gawky motions, bent arms raised above her head, sticking forward her chin to grunt. And this was clearly the best joke for many years and they were thickly round her laughing and pointing. Still the old woman danced, not giving her the tin mug of tea, rolling her eyes in her head and Heather danced too, breathlessly now, not knowing how it was going to end. As the old woman danced she chanted but they were words Heather could not understand.

"What's she saying?" she called to Michael, half because she was curious, more because she wanted to establish a contact with him which she seemed to be losing, but she didn't look round, dancing with more and more confusion and anxiety, unable any longer to laugh or smile for her efforts to follow the movements.

"Am I to live to a ripe old age?" she called more loudly, but he still didn't answer. With a great effort she turned her head and there he was, only a few feet behind her, smiling a little, listening she thought to try to catch the words. He gave her the curious feeling that she might not have called but only meant to.

"Am I to have fifteen children?" she said to him with a small gasp before she turned again, but the dance had ended, the issue of tea from the buckets had begun and there was a scramble to get it.

They drove home in the evening along a ridge between deep valleys. The colours had changed now, long black shadows and deep green foliage, things she always found surprising in Africa because they lasted so short a time and were so different from the shadeless dusty yellow of the day.

"They're lucky people," Michael said. "But they don't appreciate it."

"I thought they loved the land. Their shambas . . ."

"Don't you believe it. They'll hang on to what they've got but they don't want to live here. A place to be born, educated and retire, that's what the reserves are becoming. All old men and women and children."

He seemed more nearly pessimistic than she could remember and more serious.

"Clerks, that's what they want to be. It's their greatest ambition. All wearing shiny suits and two tone shoes."

It was dark before they came home. Tonight the mountain had stayed in its clouds. The village was quieter, many Africans about but without the noises of the morning.

"What did the old woman say, Michael?"

"Yards of it. All about the pink woman who came and danced. You'll be a legend. In twenty years' time there'll still be stories about the strange pink woman who came up the mountain."

She wondered why Michael would not tell her.

A day, sometimes two days late, the newspaper came from Nairobi and sometimes in the evening Michael read it but often it lay unopened. She found she could see it on top of the deep pile of air mail Times and have no desire to read it, actually to feel satisfied that it was there, waiting to upset her, powerless as long as she left it.

But once, passing it spread on the floor, she read, "FREEDOM

DAY PROCESSION BANNED, TWELVE-MAN DEPUTATION TO PRESENT PETITION. MANY SIGNATURES QUESTIONED." She folded it and left it on the table.

One day she knew she was stronger again, and after that each evening read it carefully and discussed it with Michael.

"Are they taking oaths again, Michael?"

"What else is there to do on dark evenings? You read a book and have a bath. The Kikuyu kill a goat and take an oath. More fun if you ask me."

"Those people at the wedding?"

"Lots of Mau Mau there. Old military family. Bride's father a field-marshal."

Three days later she read about the arrests. It was a side column on the front page, mostly the bare text of the government press release. Twenty Africans were being held for trial. Thirty-four had been sent back to their reserves. While conducting investigations leading to the arrests seventeen Africans and one African policeman had been injured, two seriously.

She tried to imagine it, the confusion and brutality which the official phrase concealed.

"The now banned Party of Liberation was only recently formed but is known to have had close associations with at least one other political party and the active sympathy of many politicians.

"Questioned in Bonn, Mr. William Ndolo would make no comment on the arrests, nor on the relationship of the Party of Liberation to the K.L.M.P.N.C. of which he is President General. Mr. Ndolo is due to fly to Nairobi arriving at four-thirty p.m. on Saturday."

The newspaper was Thursday's and today Friday. She knew that she must leave in the morning.

## Chapter Twenty

EVERY fifty yards across the Plain was a broken-down black 1948 or '49 four-seater saloon. These were the cars they used, often six or seven travelling in them. Some stood empty in the hot sun. Round others they were looking into the lifted bonnet, kneeling to blow into the petrol tank. She had never seen so many cars on the airport road.

They had been going out all day, in double decker buses, waving green branches from the windows, packed and swaying on the open backs of lorries, one small party of twenty walking with a banner, still three miles away when she passed them. William often timed his returns for Saturday.

As she came closer she began to pass the police, two wireless cars first, then several khaki lorries with the riot squads. After that the road was lined with cars and buses which could get no nearer for the crowd. She left hers and hurried forward, afraid she was late.

By dodging among the parked cars she made her way steadily nearer to the airport building. Everywhere were lines of posts joined by ropes with police in rows behind. There were so many posts and ropes that they must have taken days to erect. A section of the car park was roped off but it was empty, for by confining the crowd they had forced it to block the entrance. Round the building itself there must have been more ropes but she could see only the dense crowd pressing forward.

Unexpectedly, a small beige car was coming down the road behind her, hooting as it reached the crowd. For a minute it moved forward among them, completely surrounded, no longer hooting, then they were pushing at its sides, saw how it rocked and quickly turned it on to its roof. A small man got out and ran to the roadside but they were laughing too

much at what they had done and the way he pushed among them to stop him. He seemed familiar and when he came near Heather recognised Henry Burch.

She hurried back to him. "Hallo, Henry."

He stared at her, angry she thought, brushing his trouser legs, tightening the knot of his tie.

"That completes it," he said.

"Completes what?"

"You being here to watch. I suppose you were watching?"

"Yes, Henry." She wanted to laugh at this furious little man. "Isn't it an occupational risk?"

"Ha bloody ha," Henry said. He repeated it in several different intonations, giving snorts of laughter.

They hurried together among the parked cars to a low bank they could share with thirty Africans. This gave a view over the thickest crowd, held back from the main entrance by blue jersied, maroon helmeted police, standing shoulder to shoulder. There were thick crowds too near the car park, some singing, a man waving a tall green branch over them. She recognised the calypso with Swahili words about freeing their leaders.

The words were angry but they didn't sing them in an angry way; they came from the industrial proletariat of the cold north, should have been sung by Polish miners with hate in their half-filled bellies. The Africans had half-filled bellies, or filled with proteinless posho, but the hate was missing. They couldn't help clowning and laughing at the fun they were having, the whole exciting excursion. It was like dropping the tray with Memsahib's best china; anything which disturbed life's monotony made them laugh, especially an accident. An accident to themselves was as funny and they laughed at this with none of the ill-covered anger of a European.

Across the flat expanse of the airport a plane landed, and there was a stir of excitement but it might not be his.

"Will they arrest him?"

"It's the sort of brilliance they're capable of," Henry said.

"What would happen?"



"We should be eaten for a start."

There was another long wait then a bigger four-engined plane landed. A new song began near the car park, at its centre two round faced African women in cotton dresses, showing enormous black upper arms, grinning and joggling. They didn't dance but continuously jerked to the rhythm which they couldn't resist.

Unexpectedly and alone William Ndolo came through the main entrance of the airport. He stood there for a moment two steps up behind the backs of the row of policemen who hadn't seen him. He seemed to start forward, arms stretched out to greet the waiting crowd then see the police for the first time. He stopped and drew himself up to stare at them in surprise. It was perfectly performed and the great shout from the crowd was mixed with howls of laughter. They didn't stand still when they laughed, the emotion was too powerful. They bent from the buttocks, slapping their knees and stamping their feet. Watching closely she saw that many had already turned to tell each other what he had done.

"Oh, it's so bad for him," she said.

There was more laughter when he came down the second step, so short that he was now hidden, and tapped a policeman on the shoulder. The policeman turned, surprised and uncertain. William bowed a stiff ironical bow and stepped past.

They cheered and shouted and carried him on their shoulders rather slowly towards an open puce Chevrolet. She could watch this well from the bank because the Africans had not stayed but pushed forward to be part of the vast unseeing crowd.

"You'd think he'd won a great military victory," Henry said.

There seemed no chance of leaving so they crossed the emptying concrete and went past the police, coiling ropes and stacking posts, to the bar on the waving base.

"What has he been doing?"

"Giving television performances," Henry said. "Selling the rights in his autobiography."

"Is that all?"

"Negotiating five thousand pounds for the strikers, no doubt."

"But the strike was nothing to do with him."

Henry shrugged his shoulders. "That was why he went. And to avoid arrest Oh, he knew that was coming. Calculated that if he was going inside he'd do it in style I should say he's a bit disappointed. What an arrest it would have been. Think of them driving him through this crowd. Think of the police charging to clear a way and reading the riot act and then William asking to speak to them and quieting them at a word. I bet he thought of all that."

There were three Special Branch men at the bar and Henry showed them to her. Presently five others came. Some were smart and military in blue blazers and pressed grey flannels, some stooping and shabby in brown tweed jackets like old civil servants, one young and tall with a thin face and dark glasses who might have been a university lecturer.

"You can tell them by their eyes."

She noticed then the way they were constantly shifting them about the room but would never meet yours. Even when they took a sip of beer they were glancing over the glass edge into the bar mirror. She tried to think of them as lonely men, doing a job they didn't enjoy, cut off from friends. It might explain what had made them all come here and stand so obviously in a line.

An African at a café table said loudly, "Here are the coppers." He pointed them out to a friend. "Those big sized men with strong arms." It was a new thing in Kenya to see an African stare at Europeans with such certain superiority. He sat well down in his chair, still talking about them but they looked away, pretending not to notice.

"I'm giving a party," Henry said. "Will you come?"

"I'd like to."

"Some sort of multi-racial frolic."

"That should be fun."

"It should be hell," Henry said. "One has to shock them occasionally. It's getting harder. You've been away?"

"That's right."

"Why?"

He was anxious, she thought, not just curious but couldn't admit that he cared, might say something that hurt her.

"I got rather exhausted."

He watched her more sharply for a moment but didn't answer.

The sun was low and orange over the Ngong Hills when they went downstairs through the car park. She was surprised to see how completely empty and quiet it was, where there had been such crowds and noise an hour before. Only a few cars remained, standing by themselves at points down the road. One seemed a strange shape.

When they came close they saw three policemen squatting on their haunches at its far side, sheltering from the cool wind.

"Nice of them to look after it," Henry said.

"Ndio, Bwana." They all stood up and one saluted.

It looked odd on its roof and for a minute they did not notice that its two back wheels were missing.

## Chapter Twenty-one

HER life in Nairobi returned to normal. She went to the office in the daytime, attended meetings or read at home in the evenings. On Sundays she went to Karen for lunch with her parents. It was like being dead.

No one noticed, that was the funny thing. She watched them to see but they were all too concerned with their own lives. It might have made her laugh.

They seemed to oppress her less, as if they had at last accepted her as she was—just when she no longer cared. Sometimes she was suspicious that these two changes should have happened at the same moment.

At first she was often on the edge of tears, for the now no longer retrievable mess she had made of her life. Several times she cried to herself at night, suddenly for a minute when she remembered something she had hoped for but must not now expect. This too passed. She had thought that her holiday had given her strength to try again, and did feel healthier than at any time since she had come back, but she no longer cared to try. She could see clearly how selfish her good intentions had been.

Perhaps it was the sight of William carried from the airport on the shoulders of five thousand followers that had convinced her how naïve her hopes had been. He didn't need her help. No one had ever needed her help. It had all been a mistake, an illness of another sort from which she had now recovered.

Sometimes she had an impulse to force herself to feel, cut off her hair, walk the streets all night. There seemed no point. She no longer found it difficult to sleep. It was hard to make herself get out of bed for the office and she often came half an hour late. She smiled to see how inexplicable Robinson found this.

Tony didn't ring and she didn't expect it. He might not know that she was back. She wouldn't be seeing him.

While she was away she had thought of writing. The letter would make everything final, but she hesitated to write it, less because she had any doubt that it had to be written, she told herself, than because she could not feel enough interest.

One Saturday morning she remembered Lucy and drove to the Asian housing estate to ask her to tea.

She drove down the rutted road, between the modern houses, only realising here that she wasn't certain which was hers. The two on either side of Himji's were identical, with flat roofs and yellow walls broken by black rectangles for doors and windows. It might be more than one away, perhaps across the road. She drove slowly past, turned a hundred yards beyond, her tyres churning some red mud where a water pipe had leaked, and came slowly back. She must ask at Himji's but hesitated before the labour of explaining in broken English to his wife or mother. In a garden ahead she saw the teddy-bear faced boy.

He stood in the hot morning sun, close to the stuccoed garden wall with its two foot top of wire, as if looking along the road but trying to keep himself hidden. She stopped the car.

"I'm Heather. We met at Himji's."

"That's right."

"Is Lucy in?"

"She's in, all right," he said with emphasis, but didn't explain.

"You mean . . ."

"Just that she's in," he said, as if surprised that he had implied anything.

"Could I speak to her?"

"I'll go and see." But he made no move. "She may be busy." He still watched her before turning to go into the house. "I'll come and tell you."

She stood near the fence. The garden was as bare as Himji's.

The house rose abruptly from its yellow clay, first an uneven border of black concrete, then the stucco.

He didn't call from the door but crossed all the six yards of the garden to stand at the fence and stare at her. "She says she's busy. Is there something you want?"

"I was going to ask her to tea."

"You can't do that. She's going to Mitchell Park."

It was the week of the Royal Show, today the last day. She was confused by the boy's abruptness when he had seemed friendly at Himji's. Perhaps it was a seriousness he needed to show when carrying these messages.

"That's a pity."

"Yes," he said, as if now waiting for her to go. "You could take her there."

"Would she like that?"

"I'll go and see."

He was gone several minutes, then stood at the wall again. Something had made him flush but she couldn't tell what.

"She'll meet you by the post office at two o'clock."

"Thank you very much."

As she got into her car the boy said, "You don't want to worry about my sister." He said it like important advice from one adult to another.

She was wearing a plain yellow dress without sleeves and her chestnut coloured arms looked cool and slim. The skirt of the dress was short, as if she had grown since it was bought. In the hot afternoon she stood quietly by the post office wall, not raising her eyes to the occasional people who passed but she saw Heather quickly, took a short step forward, hesitated.

"Hallo, Lucy."

"Hallo."

They shook hands and again Heather was irritated by the formality.

"I meant to see you long before this."

"It's nice of you to ask me," Lucy said, and smiled at the ground.

"I haven't been well."

"I'm so sorry."

"Nothing serious." She was worried that she should have mentioned it, sensing that this child was already making her give way to some weakness; but she told herself that by talking openly she was encouraging Lucy to talk, to break down the barrier of politeness she seemed to keep round her real feelings. She must have real, less correct feelings.

They drove down the Ngong Road in the five mile stream of cars and buses moving steadily out of town to the show-ground. The car parks were full and they walked from the polo field across dusty grass.

Kikuyu women with shaved heads squatted behind sugar cane sticks and small piles of five or six tomatoes. Children stood beside them, their thin brown arms twisted behind their backs, sometimes so tightly that their elbows touched, their mouths open in fixed grins at the marvellous procession which passed. Close to the gates a crowd of Africans was pushing forward and she waited with Lucy for them to go in, then realised that they were only watching, crushed together, attracted by the bright stands and music inside.

She walked with Lucy along the tree-shaded avenues, between new red and blue tractors on parks of green grass, the giant soft drink bottle, the flour company's windmill. Amplified music came from many directions. Every minute the seventy foot model refinery tower blew off burning gas.

Twice when they turned a bend into a new avenue Lucy said, "Oh, how lovely," and lost interest, seemed not to want to go closer. When Heather asked which stands she had thought lovely she answered unwillingly as if inventing.

She became more and more upset by the way Lucy would not talk, knowing how it was making her talk herself. She was afraid she would start to ask about her school and home

and parents, things she was impatient to be allowed to share with Lucy and by sharing, make less fearful and difficult for her. She knew that there must be many things in her life which Lucy feared, forcing her to defend herself in this demure infuriating way.

They sat in the enclosure on the wooden benches and watched horses jumping, a procession of prize winning cattle, a display of military drill. Four-engined jet bombers roared overhead and a pageant of the history of the colony began. An early settler in a litter was followed by a lorry of white robed and turbaned Indians laying a rail of the Uganda railway, a troop of the K.A.R. in First World War uniform, a white hunter's safari, a float of model girls in the cautious fashions of a Nairobi store. Lucy was surprised, had no idea that Nairobi had not existed sixty years ago, and Heather was glad to tell her this and many other things, more, she thought, than she was understanding.

The showground was emptying when they came out, attendants standing among the litter in front of their stalls. There wouldn't be any more visitors this year and it was time to think which of the forty free bars they would call at, looking for a friend. A stall near by was already dark, as if a fuse had blown, three men in shirt sleeves calling across a stretch of grass to someone out of sight. When she appeared she was small with a sweep of fair hair above her shoulders, like an English *débutante*, which she kept tossing back.

She ran awkwardly on her toes, the grass catching her heels and one of the men jumped down from the stall to meet her. He moved with long heavy steps in contrast to her awkward teetering. As soon as Heather saw him he was familiar. She went several paces closer and stopped, now recognising the lumbering walk, the forward set of his thick neck on his shoulders, the short fair hair.

The girl ran and stood close, looking up at him, rising quickly on her toes in excitement as she talked. Tony wasn't talking, waiting till she finished, leaning his head over hers



so close that their hair must have touched. Then he began, holding a roll of paper, wagging it at her with mock seriousness. As she listened and laughed and tried to interrupt him but let herself be talked down her hands came up and she laid her fingers lightly on his wrists.

When they turned and came towards the stall, Heather was astonished to see that they were holding hands, doing it ostentatiously, swinging their arms together to show the other two above, who called down to them and pointed and laughed. She heard Tony say, "Look what I've found."

At the stall he held his hand high for her to jump, then climbed himself and they went inside.

"Who is she?" She heard Lucy close behind her with surprise and annoyance.

"I've no idea. I've never seen her before."

But she gave more away each time she spoke. She glanced sideways, pretending she had already forgotten the unimportant incident, her eyes caught by something near the arena. If only she would leave her to think what it meant, instead of standing watching her. Why must she watch her now when all afternoon she had looked away?

"You mustn't think . . ." Heather began, but it was too absurd.

"What?"

She shook her head, determined to say nothing.

They were caught in the slow stream of returning traffic and it was dark before they reached the city. It was so different from any way Tony had ever behaved to her, but perhaps she had never run up to him like that. She kept saying to herself, "I have no reason to hate her."

"I ought to go home," Lucy said.

"You can't." She laughed, trying to make her urgency a joke. "We haven't had tea yet."

"Alan will wonder what's happened."

"He's your brother?"

"That's right." But she didn't protest again, as if in her own

gentle way she had protested violently and now that this had been rudely ignored there was nothing more to say. She sat in Heather's upright armchair, her hands in her lap, one laid softly on the back of the other.

"Sorry I was upset at the show."

"Not at all . . ."

"He was someone I used to know but it doesn't matter now. It was a shock, that's all." She stopped afraid of her own tears.

"Lucy, you won't mind if I'm upset sometimes will you? What happened this afternoon was something I shouldn't have cared about I'd said to myself, I like him but I'm not in love with him. I should want him to be happy . . . It's upsetting to find one's so silly and weak."

She was worried by Lucy's silence, but it had become too important to stop

"You see Lucy, one doesn't understand, that's the trouble. Only afterwards—the mistakes you've made and then it's too late. Does that make sense?"

"I think so."

"I got ill because I didn't understand. I wanted so much to help. I could see so clearly what was wrong, all the ignorance and cruelty, but people wouldn't let me. They seemed to conspire together to keep things as they were. What I wouldn't believe was that they wanted them like that. I didn't dare let myself believe it."

As she went on it became easier to say the things she needed to say. Her heart filled with love for this thin sad girl, and because of her purity it was love for which she felt no guilt.

"Lucy, it's so nice to have you to talk to." She meant much more. She had a strong impulse to kneel close to her chair and lift and kiss her hand.

"You see I've known Tony all my life, well since I was four I suppose. He's always been there. Even when I haven't been thinking about him I really have, because I'd have been thinking quite differently if he hadn't been . . ."

She paused, anxious again at the way Lucy didn't answer.

Perhaps it was this pause which made Lucy lift her eyes from the carpet and give her a quick glance but as soon as it was noticed lower them. There was nothing particular about the glance, it was the shy way Lucy often looked at people—it completely stopped her.

It made her understand what Lucy thought of her: absurd, neurotic, laughable, not a friend but an awful curiosity she had accidentally got mixed up with, a sort of unstable aunt. She could imagine how Lucy would be too embarrassed to mention her to her school friends—or worse might tell them about her as a joke, in revenge for the embarrassment she had suffered.

She stood up quickly. "I expect you want to be going home."

It confused her but she stood too, still with her eyes down. She had no idea why she was being dismissed so abruptly. There was no reason why she should.

That night she wrote her first letter to Tony.

She had written to him before, of course, from England, sensible, careful letters about things she had seen and done and thought, trying to be honest about her opinions but at the same time put them at their least liberal.

That night she understood for the first time that these letters had had nothing to do with what she wanted to write to him, nothing at all to do with him, not even much to do with herself. For a moment it even seemed that her carefully worked out opinions weren't an important part of her, though it was an idea she did not allow to survive. The things she now wrote were about herself and about him.

"Dear Tony," she wrote, but "dear" was no good and she couldn't write "My dear" like an aunt, or "Darling" so she left it without beginning.

"Surely everything would be different if we did not feel in some obscure way drawn together. Is this a feeling you have too or is it something I have invented because I want it? I know this is possible. Even if you have it, and I believe you may have, perhaps it would be best if we forgot it, because it

seems to me that this compulsion to stay together is the worst obstacle to our coming to have a real feeling for each other. Oh, Tony, do you understand this, or am I talking nonsense? Please tell me.

"If we were to completely break this compulsive thing—I can't think of a better word—then later perhaps we could come to know and love each other as ordinary free people do."

She wrote for an hour, filling several pages, but long before she had finished she knew he would never have the patience to read more than a page.

She wrote several shorter letters, trying desperately to think of things which would compel his attention but still explain her complex feelings. There was so much now to say. She tore them up in turn, each time writing less before she knew she had gone wrong. She put away the pad and went to bed.

On several evenings that week she wrote again.

"Sometimes I think we have been so close that it is silly to try to live separate lives. But you must think this too. If you don't I shall go away and you shall never see me again."

She stopped, worried by how unlike this was to her idea in England about coming home. She had seen herself as independent, careless of unpopularity, with her own small mission to show her own people that it was possible to live with Africans.

"Oh, Tony, I know now, I expect I always knew that it was because of you that I came back to Kenya. But supposing you had rather I stayed away. I don't blame you. This isn't a letter of blame, but of apology for the tactless way I have forced myself on you. And then, as soon as I have decided never to trouble you any more you say something which makes me think you do understand, even perhaps feel fond of me, that perhaps I can put off for another day doing anything that cannot be undone, in case I am making some terrible mistake and it is just that you are forgetting to say the kind things you

feel because you assume I know them. Oh, Tony, I don't know them. Soon I shan't be able to believe them."

She sealed and addressed it and in the morning brought it to work to post and laid it on her desk till she could go out, but when, two hours later, she saw it there she tore it up quickly, without remembering what was in it. She knew that she could not bear to risk embarrassing him so that he would have to laugh. She didn't dare make such a final gesture and give him the chance to ignore it.

## Chapter Twenty-two

MR. WILLMINGTON'S letter came on Thursday. She brought it home to read and stood with it in the warm overcast evening on her veranda. The dry weather had come again but the rains could only be a few days off. Tonight the storm clouds had grown dark first on one side then another, but wouldn't break.

"Dear Miss Carew,

A word in your ear about your candidature for the position of Vice-Chairman. I feel you would like to know that several members of our society have approached me with a view to intimating that they will not be able to give you their support at our forthcoming A.G.M. Without wishing to provide details of their exact reasons, I think it sufficient to say that St. Mary's Club has always been careful to preserve a strictly non-political attitude and our members are anxious that this should continue.

"In view of the above I am wondering whether it would save embarrassment if you were to withdraw your candidature. Please be assured that I write in no critical spirit but only to pass on the views of members of our society which have been expressed to me, often in somewhat forcible terms, and with a view to shielding you from what might turn out to be a painful experience.

"I do, however, feel that, after due consideration and in the best interests of the society, I must with regret withdraw my own sponsorship. I have therefore to inform you that, should you persist in seeking election, it will be necessary for you to obtain a new proposer.

"Very sincerely yours,

"Cecil Willmington."

She wanted to go at once and tear it up in his face. She rang his office but he had left.

She walked up and down the veranda, wondering how she could bear to wait till next morning, hoping her anger would not have passed, wishing she could use it now. Or would it be better to write? If she wrote she could make sure she said every single thing she had to say, coldly, point by point—she wouldn't be there when he opened it. She wouldn't be able to see his frightened face.

She walked about her room, writing in her head: "Dear Mr. Willmington, I was not a little astonished to get your letter. Apart from its rude and offensive tone . . ." "Dear Mr. Willmington, if you listen to the vicious tittle tattle of old ladies . . ."

Several times she sat at her table with her writing block, but wrote nothing, knowing she could not trust a letter to carry her anger.

She sat on the sofa with a book. "I shall of course 'persist in seeking election' and am writing only to correct certain insulting insinuations . . ."

She spread the material for her blue dress on the floor but found herself, scissors in hand, staring towards the doorway. "Furthermore I doubt whether you are entitled to withdraw your proposal in this cowardly way . . ." After two mistakes she rolled it up and put it away.

By nine-thirty she knew she would never sleep, so there was no longer any reason for waiting till tomorrow. A new problem came to her: she did not know his home address, but the telephone book gave a street name.

She drove through town, to the new housing estates off St. Austins Road. The clouds had gone with the night and a full moon shone down on the acres of small grey bungalows, the wild country cut up by little bending residential roads. His name board was prominent: "D. C. P. Willmington." Strange all those initials she hadn't known about.

There were lights in his curtained windows but no sound

and at first none when she rang, then an inner door clicked and a moment later he was standing above her.

"Hallo," he said.

When he didn't ask her up she went past him, into the small cream hall. He moved back and stood at the entrance to the lounge. This was a double door, made of many squares of frosted glass set in cream wood.

"Do come in," he said.

She wanted to laugh that he should think that would worry her.

"I got your letter."

"Oh, yes," he said, smiling. He had crossed his short legs and raised a hand to set it against the doorway. It was some other gesture of insult but completely irrelevant. It made his jacket sleeve fall up his arm, showing his soft wrist and his watch on the expandable silver strap which sank a little into the flesh.

Past him she could see the sitting room, new but heavy, the sort of Nairobi architecture which made the walls seem several feet thick or how could there be so little space inside. There were seashells on the mantelpiece and framed geese above. The central light was an inverted mushroom of orange frosted glass, the stalk a thin chromium pipe. Close to the shelf of two dozen uniform Readers' Union books was the bridge table.

Three people sat at it, an old grey haired lady in a pearl choker, a stiff old man in a dinner jacket with a white moustache and a mouse haired woman with thin bare shoulders. They all watched the door, holding their cards in fans, waiting for the interruption to cease.

"It's the most disgusting letter I've ever had."

"Well now, could we speak about it tomorrow?" he said lightly. "Let me see, I have a date with the Lady Mayoress at nine . . ."

"I've come to talk about it now," she said. "At first I wanted to tear it up in your face. But I'm not going to do that. I'm



going to read it at the meeting so that they can all hear the dirty insinuations you spread . . .”

“Miss Carew, I’ll thank you to moderate your language,” he said in a strong whisper, not smiling now. He took his hand down and came a pace towards her as if to frighten her into good behaviour.

She noticed the way he had hunched his shoulders like a school bully. Suddenly a small cry of triumph began inside her as she realised how unbearable he was finding the scene because of the bridge guests he wanted to impress.

“For six months I’ve put up with your insults. I know the sort of things you say about me behind my back . . .”

He put out a hand and tried to grip a wrist “It’s time we went now.”

“Don’t touch me,” she shouted, but he was coming after her, in a curious stout shuffle. “I warned you,” he said several times in an intense whisper, as if less to her than as an excuse to himself for what he was going to do.

He forced her into a corner and she tried to come past across the front door but with a quick movement he blocked her way. They stood close for a second, staring furiously at each other. He was breathing heavily through the corners of his mouth with a curious hiss. He put a hand against her chest and began to force her backwards.

She began to hit at his face, crying now with anger and humiliation that he should dare to touch her. She closed her fists and beat at his nose and mouth as hard as she could, but he forced her steadily back, gripping her shoulders with both hands near her neck, hurting her so that she became faint with the pain. When she was on the doorstep he gave a hard shove and she stumbled back and sat on the gravel. He stood in the doorway, looking down at her, but when she started to stand he shut the door and she heard the key turn.

## Chapter Twenty-three

THE bar of the Oak Tree was papered with cottage wallpaper—she hadn't often seen wallpaper in Nairobi; the cockroaches got behind it and ate the flour paste. On the shelf above the fire were two coach lamps, a clockwork spit-turning machine and a brass candle-wick trimmer. Fixed to the imitation panelling were crossed flintlocks and a blunderbuss, and there was a row of cart-horse brasses on the imitation cross beam. The handles of beer pumps rose from the bar itself but they pumped no beer. It didn't keep in this climate. Tony liked the Oak Tree bar.

This was one's country, but England was Home. One could criticise England but not the truly homely things about it. The socialists, the trades unions, the Colonial Office but not the England of timbered villages and meadows and elms which he still believed in. There were things wrong with the Oak Tree, the soldier on the wall bench with an arm round his girl and a foot on the table, the suited townees out from their offices, drinking whisky, pretending to be men—none of this could affect the act of worship the place constituted to the English pub and Home.

But tonight she did not want to think how she and Tony might disagree. Sometime she would have to tell him that she had accepted no conditions. Now she wanted only to be happy again to be with him, feeling her courage returning. She did not want to ask why he had phoned—or why she had come. Tonight there seemed no need to question her weak inconsistency any more than his right to change his mind in a strong careless way.

They stood at the bar and he bought himself a second whisky, glancing at her glass, but it was still full.

"This is an odd place."

"You're telling me," he said, but she guessed the implication: odd that anything so wholesome could exist in this bloody town in this ruined country.

Tonight she could not make him out. He seemed neither cheerful nor gloomy, prepared to be either, as if a remark might start him sulking or make him suddenly laugh and look round for something exciting to do. Usually it was soon clear which would happen but tonight he seemed to continue a long time in this undecided state, a little abstracted so that he did not always hear her.

"How're sales?"

"I fixed that lot."

"Who?"

"Mr. bloody Gayfield," Tony said.

She thought it might be all she would find out, but presently he said, "If you want to know I told a customer the honest trade-in price"

She tried to guess the facts that he was slowly rearranging to tell her.

"The fool went and quoted me." He finished his drink and ordered another, angry as he remembered what had been said to him.

"What will you do?"

"I'm at Mitchell Park. Erection and maintenance."

"I saw you there."

"Did you?" He didn't even glance at her. It proved nothing. Tony had his own rules of behaviour and wasn't interested in other people's.

"At least it doesn't stink of petrol."

"How long will it last, Tony?"

He shrugged his shoulders, but looked at her sharply, suspecting criticism.

Presently, for something to talk about, or because she had to tell someone before she could forget it, she said, "A funny thing happened to me last week. I was thrown down someone's front steps."

"That's not funny, man."

"I didn't think so at the time, but I asked for it."

"What happened?"

"I went to see a man called Willmington."

"Did he apologise?"

"He was too busy locking the door in case I got inside again. I think he was having an important bridge party."

Tony finished his drink. "Come on." She drank her own, watching him uncertainly, wondering what it meant.

"Where are you going?"

"To teach someone manners."

She was confused, unable to guess why he was grasping this like a chance he must not miss

He drove fast down Government Road, making the tyres squeal as he circled the four palm trees on the roundabout.

"But Tony, how're you going to find him?"

"He'll be at the Queen's. I know the little tick."

But he wasn't, only a thin line of men, drinking whisky, not talking much, as if left behind by some larger party.

"Tony, he's probably gone home by now," but she wondered why she gave him the idea.

"Buy the drinks," he said. "I'll find out."

She waited at the bar, sipping sherry, listening to the low conversation of two men on the wall seat.

". . . Never seen so much. Didn't know a man had all that. Not just pools on the floor but all over the chairs and curtains and a good sprinkling on the ceiling. Can't think how he got it there . . ." He leant towards the other who sat tilted away, trying to withdraw from such confidences.

Tony stood at the bar entrance. "'On Friday nights my husband often has dinner with some of his business friends,'" he said in a thin mimic, but loudly so that it stopped the conversation on the wall seat and they stared. "At Chez Victor," he said and turned away.

"Don't you want your drink?" but he had gone and she hurried after him.

"Tony, it wasn't all his fault. I was being rude to him."  
It was important that she must explain how it had happened.

"That doesn't mean he can hit you."

"He didn't hit me. He just pushed me out of his door and I fell down."

"He knocked you down, did he?"

She understood now from the slow way his mind was working that he had been drinking before they met.

"But I was hitting him. I think I broke a tooth."

"Broke a tooth, man?" He turned and she saw in the light of a street lamp his grin of surprise. For the first time since she had come back to Kenya she had done something he admired.

"Why were you hitting him?"

"It was when he started to touch me. I couldn't help it."

"There you are."

He was so sure he was right that he half made her believe it.

But as they walked quickly along the dark pavement towards the restaurant she suddenly knew that it wasn't Tony who was doing this at all. It was she who had begun to tell him the story. Every careful understatement she had made had been calculated to bring him here, angry for her. She ran and stood in front of him.

"Tony, you don't know why he did it. You haven't even asked."

"I'm not interested."

"Tony, I can't come with you."

"Makes no difference to me." But some problem occurred to him. "All right, tell me," but he moved past her and she had to follow him into the restaurant.

She glanced anxiously at the few people eating as he went ahead of her between the tables towards the bar, the thick Friday night crowd, making a loud noise of many conversations, like a sundowner. He pushed forward at one end and ordered drinks.

"You see, he wrote me this letter. It upset me so much I went to see him. I started to shout things at him in his front hall." She talked fast and anxiously.

"What letter?" He hardly seemed to listen, glancing here and there among the crowd.

She saw him then, close along the bar, half turned away, with two other men who were laughing a lot. He held a pipe in one hand, elbow on the bar, and his double breasted jacket had fallen open in a way he never let it at committees. They were laughing at what he was saying and she thought it might be a dirty story—then, from the way one of them half looked at her she knew for certain that he was telling them about herself.

"There he is," she said loudly, not caring if he heard.

But Tony didn't see.

"The short vulgar looking one," she said, staring at them, angry that she couldn't think of more hurting words. He was finishing now and, because they had seen her staring, they half controlled their laughter, one turning away, the other lowering his face to snigger in his beer glass.

"Spreading more vicious stories about me," but she was alarmed by her own hysterical tone.

"We'll sort him out."

He moved forward and stood next to Willmington, waiting for the provocation. "What sort of stories?" he said, turning back to her, calling loudly.

"Anything sly and underhand and spiteful," she said. "About my politics," she said, with sudden despairing honesty.

It stopped him, as of course she should have at the start. The dirty word brought him up sharply. It made her deeply grateful that she had told him in time. She knew he would never have forgiven her if she had let him go on.

He turned from her and stared down contemptuously at Willmington who still faced away. He put a big hand on his shoulder and she could see how he was crushing it from the way Willmington squirmed.

"Next time you want to knock a woman about, man, just let me know." He gave him a shove, watched the way it made beer slop from his glass on to his shoes and moved away.

"Come on." They went out together.

They walked in silence back to the car.

"Oh, Tony, I don't know what to say."

He shrugged his shoulders. He was much less annoyed than she expected, didn't seem interested any more.

He seemed to fall back into his mood of half gloomy abstraction. They had dinner at Bertolini's and he hardly spoke.

"What is it, Tony?"

"Nothing."

She was worried that he was collecting something to say.

"You look like a constipated polar bear." She wished her nerves wouldn't make her talk.

"Well I'm not," he said, and went on eating. He bought a bottle of wine and though she only drank a glass and a half it was finished when they left.

They went to a cinema and saw a B feature about adultery in a New York hotel. There were continual shots of people hurrying in business-like groups down clean corridors, and drinking cocktails on glass balconies. Tony watched with interest.

"You've got to give them credit for thinking it up."

The lights came on and the coloured advertisements changed monotonously, then it was dark again, the main film beginning. At the same moment three smartly suited Africans passed down the gangway to the seven shilling seats ahead. The nearest was tall and thin with tufts of curly beard.

"That's Washington Itiro."

Tony made no sound. She peered at him in the half darkness to see if he had heard but he sat still and heavy, staring ahead.

"He and his wife run an employment agency."

There was no answer, and then a second later, as if he had failed to control it, an explosion of noise, half snort, half guffaw.

"What's funny?" It made her cold and angry.

"Nothing," but he went on giving heavy artificial laughs.

The three Africans were sitting now, a little noisily, once a

high pitched titter, as if they knew it was their right but felt compelled to behave defiantly.

"Tony, why's it funny that an African should run an employment agency?"

"If you don't see it's not worth explaining." He seemed genuinely to want to drop it.

"I don't see, Tony." She was frightened that she should go on, but hopeful too, that his heavy jocularly might give her a chance to discuss serious things with him without making him angry and inarticulate.

"He runs an employment agency all day and at night makes speeches to encourage the most destructive strike . . ."

"Oh, Tony . . ."

"Spreading unemployment up and down the country. He's not unemployed, oh, no. He's not hungry. His seat tonight cost two days' wages for a labourer—that doesn't matter to him."

As he talked he worked on his indignation, not caring that the people in front had turned. There was a moment, not very late in his anger when he lost his English embarrassment about making a scene. But she went on smiling as she had smiled when she had hoped for a sensible discussion, determined not to admit his right to humiliate her.

In a bright moment of the film he must have seen this and it made him more angry, as she must have known it would.

"I'm off."

"But you're taking me to a film."

"You can stay."

"I may not want to stay by myself."

"Go and sit with them."

"I may not want to."

He made a heavy snort in his nose, stood up and went out.

It wasn't till she saw the exit door swing softly shut, returning the darkness, and thought of him out there with his stupid anger that she realised how much he might need her. She still couldn't move, knowing that when she came running after him he would see it as weakness. It made her hot in the face



with shame, then she was standing, hurrying here in the dark while he could not see her.

He wasn't in the foyer and she ran down the marble stairs, past black metal sculptures like ornamental shrubs on concrete plinths, out into the night.

The street lamps made the pavement bright but she couldn't see him. She crossed to his car but it was empty, parked against the municipal flower bed of bougainvillea bushes, colourless in the blue light. She looked both ways along the shop fronts under the concrete overhang, wondering which way his indignation had taken him, then hurried back to the cinema, up the marble steps, across the foyer and looked behind a black concrete wall. He was sitting alone at a table close to the bar.

Again she had the strange feeling that he wanted to forget what had happened. He won't apologise, she thought, I shouldn't expect that. At least he's sorry. I should be grateful.

There seemed no question of going back into the cinema. They sat silently and he bought drinks.

They went to another bar, then two more. She became increasingly confused by this pointless evening. It was unlike Tony to go on in this way without purpose, as if from boredom. He criticised the places they went to monotonously. At one, when the drinks took too long he walked out. He criticised the people. She had always known he did this to compliment himself by comparison but the need to find their faults had given him insight. Tonight he did it in a dull inevitable way.

She wondered whether at last the months of doing jobs he despised, belonging to a country he had come to hate, had destroyed his hope. Or was it that her own long years of needing him were ending? It was hard tonight to find much about him she liked, as if he was intentionally making himself hateful. Perhaps it was intentional. Perhaps in a way he half understood he was doing this last protective thing for her.

"Tony, I want to go home."

He shrugged his shoulders. He finished his drink and they went to the car.

He came quickly to her side and caught her wrist.

"What do you want, Tony?"

He didn't answer, just held her wrist tightly, swaying above her. She was frightened, knowing how drunk he had become, guessing that it might only be his lunge for her which had made his stomach turn and was forcing him to hesitate.

"Tony, please let go."

Presently he did.

She was frightened in the car, wondering how it would end, whether he would give her his polite kiss, or his grunt of good-night, standing several feet away, things she knew she had deserved because he had recognised something cold in her. She hoped for anything so simple, but no longer expected it. All the way she talked quickly, giving him no chance.

But he didn't try to talk and this she found more frightening, suddenly was thinking of the silly dramatic warning he had given her—but it was too absurd. Anyway she hadn't seen William since—except of course at the airport.

He couldn't be so childish. But she no longer felt she could guess what he would do. It seemed likely that the explanation of the whole horrible evening was that he had known where it was leading.

Past the nameboard, H. CAREW, brightly lit for a second in his headlights, they circled the flower bed and stopped opposite her front door. At once she got out and hurried towards it but her key stuck and he was standing above her, not touching her but close so that she could smell the whisky.

She kept quite still, no longer trying to turn the key. "What do you want?"

"Aren't you going to say good night?"

"Yes, Tony." The key turned now but she didn't move the door.

"May I come in?"

"Oh, Tony, you don't really want to."

"Why else would I ask?"

She thought desperately for some way to persuade him to go. Then, worse than this, she didn't want to persuade him. She knew that something horrible was happening to her and that in a minute she would want to be humiliated by this man she now despised.

She gave a low groan and ran into her sitting room. He followed slowly down the passage.

"Go away Tony, please."

"Look Pony man, we aren't children any more."

"Some of us are, Tony. Oh, Tony, I don't mean you. I mean all of us."

He went to her cupboard and poured himself a whisky. He turned to her, holding it, not drinking yet. "A chap's flesh and blood."

It had been said to him by some friends in a club. It showed her all she liked least about him, his brutality, his second-hand ideas.

"Tony please, please go. It won't solve anything, Tony. It'll make everything worse."

He went on staring at her, making some slow drunken judgement. He drank the whisky.

"Have it your own way."

He turned and went down the passage to the drive.

She stood still, listening to his heavy steps, the grind of metal on stone as one foot struck the shoe scraper, then the crushed gravel.

"Tony," she called, but not loudly and a second later she heard the car door slam.

He won't ever come back, she thought. He went so quickly, without even asking a second time. Oh, Tony, how could you be so horrible.

## Chapter Twenty-four

THE rains broke. Lying in bed she listened to the heavy shower coming across the valley, rattling the leaves of the trees then the first large drops on her corrugated iron roof, growing quickly to a violent drumming. Through it the continuous hiss of rain falling on the drive and after a minute the splash of overflowing gutters.

There wasn't much wind, just the heavy rain, beating each second more loudly, slackening, increasing again, then slowly passing and the dripping stillness before the next . . . Her father with bent shoulders and running mackintosh, shaking the water from his hat "Eighty points already." Sometimes an inch had fallen in an hour. It had made them so happy. Now the grass would grow, the weeks of worry were over. She could never hear heavy rain without feeling happy for the way it was wetting the dry earth.

Riding on the high moorland where the giant heather began she had felt the bleakness of rain up there close under the clouds, had been frightened that they should be trying to live in such an unnatural place, wondered if her parents had miscalculated about this too as they did about prices and crops, but the feeling had never been so strong as her excitement and relief. She had turned and ridden home early to see how happy it had made them.

William's phone call came on Saturday.

"Mr. Henry Burch tells me that you are coming to this party he is having."

"Yes, William."

"You are coming alone? May I please be allowed to bring you?"

"No, William, I don't think so."

"You are not then coming alone?"

"I don't know, William. Wait, will you."

She laid the receiver on the bookcase and stood at the veranda door, the morning sunlight on the green trees, the small bright birds moving quickly among the branches. She came back and reached to lift it but went and sat on the sofa. She remembered Tony and her brother going to a fancy dress party.

They had been Holy Innocents, each wearing nothing but a nappy. It was Tony's idea. They had had to cross Nairobi and the car had stalled in Government Road. She knew how angry Tony must have been and how absurd, angry in a nappy. One of the games at Tony's school had been to raise a Tony-bate, a dangerous game because those who weren't quick enough to scatter would be hurt.

It was Tony, of course, not Charles who had walked in his nappy to the garage. She remembered how she had wished he had made Charles go, and how, when the story was being told, Charles had seen how she was despising him. She crossed and lifted the phone.

"Thank you, William."

"You will then allow me . . ."

"Yes, yes." If only he would hurry so that it could be settled.

"May I then call at nine o'clock?"

"Yes, William."

The heavy grey clouds were gathering again, but it was warm in the sun. The trees smelt fresh and clean as she walked among them and she smelt the earth and the grass.

High against the clouds she saw the kites circling over the city rubbish dump. They kept their wings still, gliding and banking in high circles, going round and round, as if contained in some invisible balloon. There were twelve or fifteen of them and she thought she could hear their shrill cries up there.

They filled her with sadness, these distant gloomy birds, circling against the grey and white clouds, circling under the

hard destructive sun as they had been for thousands of years—only the refuse had changed from the dry carcass on the plain to the municipal tip. They made her life seem small and pointless. Then, in a way which frightened her, she found their eternal pointless living and dying attractive, felt drawn to it like a sensual temptation, which she must not give way to.

In the late afternoon she dressed in a white waistless dress she had bought while they were fashionable in England and a cloche hat her mother had given her, shuddering for a second as it touched her forehead. She would call herself "The Twenties". She found a net of tennis balls. "I'll call myself 'Mummy's Tennis Party'." She stood in front of the mirror, turning on the light to see herself for the darkness of the gathering clouds. The dress hung away from her belly as if she were pregnant, then narrowed to its waist below her hips. It had no sleeves and made her brown arms seem long and deformed. The hat came down over her face. The whole effect was so startlingly ugly that it shocked her into a short laugh. She turned away, feeling the tears behind her eyes. As she turned the thunder crashed, much nearer and louder than she expected so that she stood terrified for a moment before she recognised it.

It rained for an hour and the streams of red water ran down the edges of her flower beds and the grass in a hollow below the trees stood an inch deep in a yellow puddle. It stopped, then rained heavily in the darkness, but when William came and she walked out across her wet drive to his car she was surprised to see stars above and looking back above her house the moon between hurrying white clouds.

"You see, Heather, this is my fancy dress, he he he." His laughter was full of conceit and condescension but behind it there was some genuine amusement. He wore a neat dark suit.

They drove across town to Eastleigh where Henry Burch lived—because he knew how it caused offence. There were rows of low vegetable shops, mostly closed, a few with old

Africans sitting motionless in front. There were continuous smells of vegetables and decay and once for fifty yards of drains, but the streets seemed quiet and it was hard to believe they hid all the vice she had heard about.

"Heather, you can perhaps help me. You know a Mr. Marlow."

He glanced sideways, noticing the start of surprise she could not prevent.

"He has visited me."

She kept still, waiting for what would happen. She thought, it can't be very bad. If it was very bad I should have heard.

"I like your Mr. Marlow. He is most straightforward."

She didn't understand, just shook her head.

"It is very preferable for me to deal with such a man. I know where I stand. He is frightened. His anger shows me how frightened he is. It is my job to show him that he need not be frightened. It is much more difficult to deal with your multi-racialist who is always pretending he is not angry or frightened."

She wanted to deny that Tony was ever frightened, but knew she must not defend him.

"I believe Mr. Marlow liked me."

"Oh, no . . ." Even if it was true it wasn't important because Tony would never admit it. But she was sorry she had spoken.

"In every way I like Mr. Marlow except one, he has not told me why he has come."

"What did he say?"

"He is giving me a serious warning to keep out of his way. When I have told him that it is the first time I have heard of him so please will he tell me how I have been in his way he has become very angry and said not to pretend I do not understand."

"That was all?"

"He said many insulting things but because he was so angry they were not sensible."

"It isn't important. He gets excited . . ." but she stopped, ashamed of her disloyalty.

"Heather, you must not tell me if it is important. Mr. Marlow has said very insulting things. I shall decide whether this is important. Fortunately I am not angry because I think Mr. Marlow must be mad."

She shook her head. "Just not afraid," she said. She was angry now, his assumption that he could choose calmly whether to take offence.

"Perhaps, Heather, you can explain the behaviour of Mr. Marlow."

"He didn't want you to see me."

"This I have guessed from some little thing he said."

"It doesn't matter now."

"To you, Heather, it may not matter. It is I who have been insulted . . ."

"Oh why can't you grow up," she said. "You all strut about, waiting to be insulted"

"Heather, I have not reached this cleverness yet. I am a poor savage. When people say rude things to me I think they are behaving badly and this makes me angry."

He could have been telling her something interesting, about how the polite values of civilisation turned people into an insincere charade, but it was only an argument. He was already too clever and civilised himself.

"If you'd told me a week ago," she began, but why should she tell him. She understood more clearly now how Tony's suspicions had preoccupied him.

"This was not possible since Mr. Marlow has only seen me this morning."

She was busy with her own thoughts and it was several seconds before she heard him. Then it was unbelievable and she wondered whether her mind had invented it.

"As soon as he has left I have rung to find out if you agree with Mr. Marlow that I must not see you."

They turned down a side road, through deep puddles where



the tyres slobbered mud and threw up yellow spray. They stopped beside a group of cars on an open space among ditches and banks of worn grass. Behind a concrete bungalow a gramophone was playing thinly, but there was no other noise. If only she knew what it meant.

"So, Heather, you would like me to take you home?"

He should have ceased to concern himself with her because she had hurt his pride too much. Then, a week later . . . She got out and hurried towards the bungalow.

She came through a concrete arch into a courtyard and here was the party, but somehow it wasn't a party. The fifteen or twenty people stood in small groups round the edge, talking in low voices or just staring into the empty concrete courtyard. The music came from a gramophone on a table in a lighted doorway. A tall African kept still beside it.

Over everything was the moon, high and by itself now, making the centre of the courtyard a square of grey light, but this only emphasised its emptiness and hid in darker shadows the people under the eaves. She paused, wanting to go somewhere before William followed, but there seemed no bar or more crowded place. She looked for Henry Burch but couldn't see him.

Against one wall two figures squatted by a fire, concentrating on the sticks of cooking meat, as if this job enabled them to separate themselves from the low spirited party. A turbaned Sikh beside her said, "It is smelling like this crematorium."

Because he didn't turn it was several seconds before she guessed he was speaking to her. She was about to answer when she was confused by the idea that he might be a European in Sikh fancy dress.

"It is having this crematorium smell, where they are also cooking meat, yes?"

"I suppose so."

"You do not think? You are telling me at this crematorium they are cooking whole animal, here only specially selected parts."

"No, no, I wasn't," she began.

"All offal they are removing . . ." But she hurried away, down the courtyard.

Many of the people she passed were in costume and this increased her sense of loneliness because she was not sure whether she knew them. She began to hunt desperately, staring as long as she dared. One girl with a hood and a cloth over her mouth and nose she was sure she knew and the girl stared too, her dark eyes between the edges of material as if she also was on the point of speaking. Perhaps there was something so terrible about her own appearance that they would not admit they knew her.

As she passed one pair after another she was increasingly upset by the way they were not asking her to join. Most seemed to have chosen full costumes and she felt unprotected in her small white dress with her long bare arms, holding this idiotic net of tennis balls. She bent quickly to leave them in a corner but as she pushed them forward on the ground something moved and she saw that she was setting them beside a pair of dark trousered legs. She gave a small gasp and hurried away, not looking up to see whose they had been.

She had almost passed Henry Burch before she saw him.

"Hallo, Heather."

"Hallo."

He didn't seem to notice that she had no drink. Standing here in the shadow where he couldn't be seen, he gave her the feeling that he wanted to dissociate himself from his party.

"I expect you know everyone."

"How can I?" but she stopped herself.

He didn't seem to hear, didn't even introduce her to the two people he was standing with. It was as if some great disaster had happened which everyone else knew about, making the ordinary politenesses of a party ridiculous.

"I couldn't find you."

"I've been here all the time."

"I was looking for you near the entrance."

"That's why you couldn't find me."

He must introduce people, that was the first thing, make them meet each other and talk.

"Can I help, Henry? Can I take round the drink?"

"If you want to, Heather."

He was laughing at her. How could he do it, after all the encouragement he had given her? He had been laughing ever since she came back, as if he could not help despising something he had created. To be wearing a suit, that was the worst insult, as if he had intended to make them all absurd.

His ridicule cured her. She was angry that he could treat his party in this way. It wasn't only his party. It belonged to them all. Its success or failure was theirs.

She was near a tall young man dressed for the city, in bowler hat and umbrella. "Why won't he do anything?" she said loudly, glad to see Henry's head turn.

"You refer to . . ."

"He just stands there. It's as if he wants it to go badly."

"Oh, I doubt that."

"You doubt it!" He made her wild, this limp young man. At the same moment, standing beyond him, watching her, she saw the same turbaned imitation Sikh, and though he said nothing she knew he was going to start again about the crematorium. She turned and hurried into the house. She went down a passage, round a bend and here there was a table with drinks, behind it a plump Indian with greased hair.

"Hallo there, have a drink."

She wondered whether she needed one but went past. Standing in the doorway of the room beyond she realised that she had not even answered, felt her face turn red, his astonished stare at her back.

It was a small bright room, with polished incidental tables and two small suburban sofas in flowered chintz. It was another of Henry's jokes to make a room like this in Eastleigh. On one of the sofas were two young Indians in dark

suits with dark glasses; on the other a European in a white sheet with a silver cardboard halo fixed to the back of his head by adhesive tape, and Mrs. Ituro. She wore a great mauve smock with white lace edgings and seemed even more enormously pregnant than at her office. There was complete silence in the room as if they had long ago run out of things to say.

She wanted to go away but all four had looked up, grateful for the relief she had already brought. She hesitated, went two uncertain steps into the room.

"Hallo," she began, then saw William.

He stood behind the door, looking at Henry's book shelves, but hadn't taken any out and she knew he wasn't interested. He could not bear to be seen unattended and had to pretend it was his choice. She was astonished to find him here and knew how bored and resentful he must be.

"There's someone I want you to meet, William." Unless something was done quickly he would leave.

He followed her out of the room. At the bar she paused. "Won't you have a drink?"

"No, thank you."

"Do you mind if I do?"

"I do not mind." He watched her all the time she drank, his head tilted back, smiling with thin mockery. He would have to do this for some time till he had recovered his importance. He would be smiling when he cut your throat, they said. She wondered if he had always watched her in this contemptuous way. It made her shiver.

"Have you given up drinking?"

"No, Heather."

"Have one then."

After several seconds, as if deciding whether merely to note this new symptom, he said, "My people do not drink a little and a little, so they are always not quite sober, not quite drunk. When they drink it is to make some real change in themselves. Would you like that?"

"Do what you like," she said, close to tears. They went down the passage towards the courtyard and she looked for someone to introduce to him. They stood at the doorway near the gramophone, the raucous music covering her silence.

For the first time she felt that there might after all be a party. An outside bulb lit a group of seven or eight Asians and Europeans, not exactly having a jolly time but at least eating meat off skewers together. She knew several of them and was surprised that she had not seen them before. By themselves in the middle of the courtyard Iuro was dancing with the girl in purdah whose eyes she had recognised. He danced with his legs bent, his long ape-like body almost parallel to the floor, clapping his hands between his knees to the rhythm, darting towards her and away, while she stood helpless with laughter at the way his quick movements confused her.

Slowly the party became more active. More people danced and the records seemed more exciting. She danced with William, with the Cambridge educated son of an Indian cloth merchant, with a round young clergyman in civilian disguise. She tried to shut her mind to thought, to be absorbed by the fast awkward dancing, the way they turned and spun her and drew her towards them, then threw her back, wanting the giddiness it gave to go on and on.

She knew that all her strength had gone again and only wanted to hide herself. She was worried at the way her moods were now changing faster, as if she was on some accelerating see-saw which must ultimately crash. Even the now successful party worried her because it seemed unbelievable that an hour earlier it had been such a failure and she wondered if this had been another delusion.

Left alone, she could not bear to wait by the wall and went into the house, past the bar, to the small room where she had found William. It was dark now, she was glad to see. Standing in the doorway she switched on the light.

At first she did not understand what she saw, then the

shapes rising above the arm of the nearest sofa were the soles of a pair of black shoes.

On the sofa was a young Indian lying above a plump young English girl who she knew well for her Liberal Society work. She wore a frilly white dress and lay half sideways to the sofa with her frill covered knees up its back and her head hanging off its seat towards the floor. She giggled in a helpless way at Heather as if such an absurd accident must be a joke. Heather turned out the light.

She stood against the doorway watching the dancing in the courtyard. It was half a minute before some movement made her glance towards the concrete archway and see something so terrible that she looked away, knowing it was another fantasy. She was more sure of this because of the way they went on dancing. Others still stood against the walls, holding glasses, or bent over the fire turning meat. None of them had noticed anything—because there was nothing to notice. She went on putting off looking again. Perhaps she need never look—with a jerk she turned her head and they were still there.

They stood a yard inside, wearing open necked shirts and rolled sleeves. Standing there together they gave the impression that everyone else in the courtyard was small and deformed, themselves the only properly built healthy animals. They stared down as if what they could see shocked them more than they had expected, letting it work on their anger.

She knew at once that she must do something while they were still unnoticed and this chance might last only a few seconds. She began to hurry along the side of the courtyard, avoiding the dancers, forced to pause once while a couple twirled in front of her. She came close and they still hadn't seen her.

"Tony, why have you come?"

"Why do you think?" He spoke thickly and she guessed he had been drinking.

"I've no idea. You weren't asked, surely . . .?"

"We've come to have a look," Charles said.

"You don't come to have a look at other people's parties."

"Why are you dressed like that?" Tony said. It was as if he could no longer stop himself telling her what he found most disgraceful. It made her understand how the party must appear to him a disgusting orgy, how Europeans dressing up in front of Africans would seem disgracefully undignified, for a girl not much different from soliciting.

"It's fancy dress," she began.

He gave a heavy snort.

"Your bedtime," he said with thick anger. She could imagine his big arms at his side wanting to start grabbing and striking people.

"Tony, even if I wanted to leave, you're making it impossible."

He had no answer. She made him more angry by trying to trap him into discussion.

"I don't imagine you want to make a scene here," Charles said.

"I'll make a scene where I like," she said. "Who's making this scene?" All her anger for Tony was turned on this weak brother of hers who had followed him but was already alarmed that he had come.

But she knew she must be reasonable and persuade them. "Tony, can't you see how ridiculous you're making yourself?"

He took a step forward but he was much too slow and she stepped away. Even then she might have tried again but Charles was moving too. She turned and ran back across the yard.

She ran through the doorway, down the passage, listening for the sounds of fighting, but it still hadn't begun. She turned the corner past the bar and ran straight through the small square room, out by its far door, vaguely aware of two figures sitting up in surprise on the sofa. It brought her to a hall and she went out of the front door, shutting it behind her.

She ran among the parked cars and suddenly her ankle

bent and she was on the ground, gripping it with both hands, sobbing with pain. For half a minute she knew she could not move. As she crouched she expected each second to hear the front door open or people come running from the side entrance. But nothing happened. The gramophone was still playing and this surprised her. Slowly the pain became bearable and she began to limp down the lane, splashing in the muddy puddles.

She sat in the filling station office while the African pump boy rang for a taxi. Fifty yards back a car drove from the side road and turned to come past. She sat behind the piled cans of lubricating oil and it didn't stop. She didn't know it.

The taxi came, but when she sat in it she knew she could not bear to go home. She made it drive through the bottom of the town, past the concrete factories and warehouses, grey and deserted in the moonlight, towards the airport. She lent forward, directing it off the tarmac, down the unmade road which had been hard ruts but was now wet and puddled. The driver went where he was told but never answered. Because of the darkness she had no idea of his face: if only he would speak and tell her he was a real person . . . She stopped him and passed the money over his shoulder. She stood by the garden wall, looking up at the square house, glad to see lights.

There was one upstairs in a curtained window. Lower there was a bare bulb which might hang above stairs. Something about the house made her sure that everyone was not in bed. She had an idea they would be doing different things in different parts of it. The doors would be open and they would occasionally see each other as they went to fetch things they needed. A curious noise made her start.

It was like high fast talking, as if someone had suddenly grown angry in the middle of an infinitely long, low conversation, but though she listened hard she could hear nothing



more. It made her shudder. It convinced her that everything she had thought about Lucy and her brother, and the gentle way they lived would be changed if she went in and found them when they did not expect her.

She went quickly towards Himji's house. Her ankle ached steadily and she knew it was swollen. She rang the bell and there was silence, then with no preliminary sound the door opened.

"Miss Carew!"

As soon as the light fell on her she knew how astonishing she must look, her absurd white dress splashed with mud, wet mud covering her shoes. She pulled off the hat, held back her head and shook out her short hair.

"Could you please take me home."

"Of course."

It wasn't a real answer, just a polite sound to cover her rude haste, the way she had insulted him by suggesting he might not do this for her.

She went ahead into the small bright room, the strip lighting, the glass cases of toys, the hanging Swiss chalet of black shelves. There was a chair sideways to the table but nothing on the table and no sign of what he had been doing, sitting here alone. His quietness made her guess it was something he tried to avoid.

Or perhaps he had been asleep on the table. It occurred to her that he might not be able to read. She had a moment's clear view of a strange world in which it was common to sit alone in the evening and be frightened. It seemed to come from a long time ago.

"You see, I've hurt my foot," she began but it made things more complicated.

When she didn't go on he asked no question. She was astonished by his politeness. She was sure it was real, not formal, because he understood that politeness was to protect people and was all the time aware of how they needed this. For the first time that night she felt that she was being treated

kindly. She was amazed to think that all these other people who were supposed to be protecting, even loving her should have given her no feeling like this.

They sat side by side in the two armchairs of laminated wood and chromium piping. Gradually, as if it was an effort to lift himself out of the sadness of his own company, Himji talked. Though she knew he was doing it for her it didn't matter.

"Often they have been having rifles made of an old pipe, the firing bolt working by elastic. Would you want to be staying and fighting?"

She noticed almost the exact moment when it was no longer an effort because he was exciting himself by what he was saying, leaning forward, anxious that she should understand.

"I am seeing them make a good fight. I tell you because I am in the bottom of this valley and they are shooting each other from both two sides. I am saying to myself, Himji, this is no place for you but you cannot go this way and you cannot go that way so you must be having patience and staying in this little hole.

"In this fight I have seen one European running hard as he can go after this Mau Mau and this Mau Mau is kneeling down and taking careful shot and completely missing and after that he is losing his courage and dropping his rifle and this European is shooting him with his pistol first time and he is taking this great big jump six feet in the air then falling down quite dead."

Though Himji fired both guns in their different ways, half kneeling out of his chair for the rifle, he now hesitated and did not take the big jump in the air as he might have done for a larger audience. He put both hands to his heart and lowered his head.

"One day my friend and I are finding two Africans in a stream on his farm. Both are having their eyeballs spiked with sharp sticks. One is quite dead. The other is lying in

this stream and we are knowing he is not dead because of this strange breathing he is making, like water running from a basin. He is there ten hours.

"They are not having this respect for life. Now it is a little quiet and they are behaving like very civilised men in their smart cars and new suits. Tomorrow they will again start chopping people into very little pieces and eating the brains of little children when they are warm."

"Oh, do you think . . . ?"

"I do not think, Miss Carew, I know. There are many Asians on the railways who are not going on this strike, but are still working. Do you think they are happy, wondering all day if they will find their wives and children alive when they are coming home?

"We are foolish people, Miss Carew. Long long ago we should have seen that it was the African's side we must be taking. We are thinking we are superior to these beasts and should help you keep them down. You are not liking us for it. You are treating us too like an inferior people, fit only for business. In thirty years I have only once been taking some meal at a European's house."

For a moment she was angry again at such short-sighted stupidity. It didn't work any more. It was habit from an earlier time.

Himji drove her home and there was a car in her drive. It was low and dark and stood at the far side under the trees. She was surprised till she remembered it was her own because William had fetched her. They circled past it and stopped by her porch.

She stood at the open car door, bending to look in. Any thanks she could give seemed hopelessly inadequate. She held her hand into the car. "Goodbye."

"Goodbye, Miss Carew. I am so sorry I am talking so much."

"Oh, you haven't."

"I think so. Often I am carrying myself away by my own elocution. We are not like these Africans. We cannot keep a secret. They are very good. Sijui—bas. I do not know. And you will not make them say. This is why they are so good at their plans and schemes. So much better than we could ever be. If we are having a plan to murder someone, everyone of us is telling his friend. We are so happy about it."

She was sorry to be told more about his failings when she could only think of his kindness. As she bent to shake hands with him and he held her hand a long time, going on speaking, she could see out of the corner of her eye her own car under the trees. It wasn't till she had shut his door and moved back a pace that she remembered putting her car in the garage.

There would still have been time to stop him.

"Goodbye," he called, his voice shut into the car so that he had to roll down the window and call again.

She couldn't answer. She thought that her silence might stop him and he did seem to hesitate, his teeth white in the moonlight as he smiled up at her, his whole face unexpectedly pale, then the powerful engine of his Mercedes revved and he moved away. She could see clearly now that it wasn't even a Morris under the trees but a black D.K.W.

Even now she might have shouted but she no longer wanted to. She knew that this was something she could no longer run away from, as she had been running from it for much longer than this evening.

Something in the car moved, or perhaps it rocked, making a reflection shift where the moonlight came through the trees. Then its inside light went on. He seemed to be feeling the dashboard. Presently he found what he wanted and lit a cigarette.

He did it without hurry, put the packet in his pocket, sucked and puffed, only then turning in her direction, setting one arm over the seat back. She walked painfully towards him.

She crossed behind the car and opened the passenger's door but didn't get in, suddenly seeing the pointlessness of this manoeuvre.

"William." He went on smoking away from her, staring across the drive towards the house.

"William, I'm sorry about tonight."

He didn't answer. She thought that one side of his shirt collar might be unusually high above his jacket, as if it had been violently disturbed. Still without turning he got out of the car.

She was badly frightened then, knew he was going to ask to come inside and that she must stop him before it became involved with his pride. She ran and stood in front of him.

For a second she could only stand there, gasping from the pain of her ankle. "William, you must go away."

"So! You are sorry but I must go."

"Yes, William."

He was silent for several seconds. "Your friend Mr. Marlow has known you were at this party."

She saw what he meant. "Oh, you're quite wrong."

But he didn't believe her. It confirmed his disbelief that she should keep him standing here.

She must convince him that it hadn't been a trap, not for her own safety but because otherwise he might never again trust anyone. She had left her key behind the geranium urn and somehow this made it harder to do what she had to do, then she was limping away from him, bending for it.

He followed her and all the time she was feeling among the dead leaves with her back to him, then fitting it into the lock, she shivered with fear, expecting his hands to touch her, knowing it was idiotic but unable to stop herself expecting it. Even if he did it accidentally she knew she would scream.

She hurried ahead, switching lights in the passage, then the sitting room, wanting the place to be bright before he came.

Then he was in the doorway. She noticed that his tie was a tight knot and wondered if this too was a change.

All the mannered smoothness she was used to and had still been imagining in the darkness had gone and he was only sullen and angry. It made her like him better, perhaps for the first time feel some real liking for him.

"William, why should I tell him? What good could it do me?"

He just stared, then he was moving forward. He took slow steps so that he might have been moving into the room to continue the conversation. After each he seemed to pause as if he might or might not go on coming towards her. She could bear it no longer and ran back across the room.

He came after her and caught her forearm half-way to the elbow. In his strong grip her whole arm and body felt powerless. She did not try to pull herself free.

"What do you think you're doing?"

"Why do you run away, Heather?"

"Let go this minute." She didn't trust herself to look at him, afraid that she wouldn't be able to speak because she would see someone she didn't recognise.

To her surprise she was free and she opened the bedroom door and went through. When she turned to shut it he had put his shoe inside.

She stood there, pushing and panting, but didn't start to crush his black shoe.

"So, Heather, we may not talk."

He made her completely distrust what she was doing. Even the way he had gripped her arm might have been anxiety to make her stay and explain.

She felt the door move and leant harder against it, but knew that in a moment he would use his full strength, could already feel herself growing exhausted. She gave way quickly and ran across her room and bent to the drawer where she kept her long cutting out scissors. As she bent, more fright-

ening than anything before, she began to doubt whether she should do this.

Suddenly it seemed that this was to be the test of everything she had hoped for and that unless she could accept it her whole attitude had been hypocritical. It might be the first and only real thing she had done, the chance she had wanted to become truly involved.

She felt none of the shame she had felt when she had wanted Tony to humiliate her but that it was important and necessary, the only way she could make up for her sinful ambition which she had inflicted on them all.

She waited, facing away from him, her chest heaving, wondering whether she would be brave enough. If only he would come quickly. She could bear it no longer, turned, and was surprised to see him still in the doorway, smiling in the thin superior way she hated. She noticed that the door was only now completing its slow swing open and remembered that she had not heard it slam back when she had left it, as if after all he had not been pushing.

"Good night, Heather." He turned and went through the sitting room, down the passage.

She ran to the doorway, but he was already in his car, the engine going. He circled the drive, seeming to stare as he came towards her, but didn't slow as he drove past. She watched his red tail lights hesitate at the gateway then pass beyond the hedge. She wondered how it was that she could still be here, apparently alive when her shame should have made it impossible.

As she went on watching the gateway, empty now in the grey moonlight, another car passed. At first she had only the impression that it had been there unexpectedly. Gradually she realised that she might have heard no approaching engine noise.

She began to run down the drive, limping and gasping. When she came through the gateway she saw it, at the very top of the rise beyond the dip. After a moment its moving

circle of light passed out of sight. She was about to go back to the house when she realised that this had been William's car because the other was now also climbing the rise. It seemed small and ghostly in the moonlight. She had not seen it before because it was using only its side lights.



## Chapter Twenty-five

SHE didn't try to sleep. Sometimes she lay on her bed and cried a little but not much. Sometimes she stood in her sitting room, quite still for several minutes, trying to solve it all, then not trying. She wondered whether there had been some simple secret which she should have known.

It seemed strange to be standing here, between the red and yellow cushions and oatmeal curtains, the neat shelves of orange Penguins and pale blue Pelicans, when she was already so far away. It was like being allowed for a moment to visit her past. This was where she had lived. These were the books she must have known the titles of. She must have sat in this chair and had these hopes.

Sometimes she thought the dawn was coming and went to her veranda window and looked out over the trees of her garden, but it was only the yellow glow of the city street lamps in the sky. The moon had gone but the stars were bright, the bright stars she had known as a child in the highlands.

By six she had packed her case but she waited for Mwengo. Once she went to wake him, out on to the drive in the grey dawn, the shapes of trees against a clear sky, the stars gone except the brightest. It was going to be fine. She stopped and shivered, then went the other way to see the garden, where she had sat only a few months before, her cases round her, putting off the moment of going in. She walked slowly under the trees in the wet dew, then up on to the veranda and stood there outside the locked door. An hour later, when the sun had risen and was shining softly among the leaves of the trees, she remembered it was Sunday and Mwengo would not come.

She might have known by the quiet peacefulness of the morning, no distant whine of traffic, hurrying to work down

Sclaters Road, just an occasional single engine going the other way, out into the country for a day's fishing, the family picnic with the folding chairs and safari stove on the escarpment. Instead of despising these things she was filled with envy, wished that by some magic one of them would turn aside and ask her to come.

She locked the house, wrote a careful Swahili message to Mwengo and drove slowly to her parents' house at Karen.

In the days that followed it did not occur to her that she would get well. She had lost and that was all. She did not want to blame anyone. It was only people who did not help themselves who got no help . . . it didn't much matter. She began to say her prayers again at this time but she did not ask for help, just to be forgiven.

Her parents were very kind, though they showed no surprise. She did not resent this. How could she, when they had been proved right?

Once, standing at the french window, the bright red and yellow flowers in the sunlight, she had an idea that her mother, behind her in the sitting room, was going to ask her why it had happened and she wanted to go away and avoid the pointless tears and explanations. But she didn't move.

"Open the window, dear, if you find it too warm."

Sometimes for the whole morning she would lie in bed, neither happy nor especially unhappy. Sometimes she walked in the shade of the wild olive trees, looking up to the four points of the hills, green in the sunlight then dark under gathering clouds.

All day the clouds gathered and in the late afternoon there would be some heavy rolls of thunder then the drenching rain. She liked the rain. It was almost the only thing at this time that she positively liked. She waited for it and felt pleased when it came and stood at her window, watching it beating down the plants in the garden through the continuous film of water which ran down the glass.

After three days Himji rang.

"Next Sunday some friends of mine, we are having this curry. We shall buy some whisky. Could we be having the honour . . . ?"

"No, Himji, I'm afraid not."

"I am so sorry." She could hear his genuine disappointment.

"I'm sorry too, Himji."

"Perhaps another time."

He waited for her to answer but how could she.

Himji rang on Saturday. "My friends have been saying, cannot I be persuading you?"

"I really can't. How did you know I was here?"

"Your boy is telling me. Miss Heather, my heart is so full."

She didn't understand. "I'm not well, Himji."

He paused for a second but didn't refer to it, as if it would be impolite to draw attention to such a transparent excuse.

"Miss Heather, we have been so close."

There was no answer. Probably it had been her call at midnight, the sudden gesture of weakness which he had never believed a European could make.

"Perhaps one day, when you are needing some little thing, very cheap, second-hand, you will be coming again to my garage."

"Oh Himji, it isn't that. You don't understand."

But of course he did understand. He was just another of the people she had used to try to cure herself.

As soon as they became interested she ran away, as soon as they began to ask for the things they needed instead of those she had fixed to give them.

She read no papers, but one day Charles came and told them about the riots. "Thought there was something up when I passed Kingsway police park. Thirty or forty cars, all with smashed windscreens." He was pleased he had had the luck to be there.

"All over the town the roads were shining with broken glass. At one place they got on a soft drinks lorry and threw out every bottle. Inches of it." He turned to tell it to her too, pleased to have trapped her into listening, but she turned away.

"All started by an Asian who knocked down an African child. When the Uhuru boys gathered round he panicked and tried to drive away but they smashed his windscreen and he went into the back of a lorry." It was a story which particularly pleased Charles, showing clearly how African and Asian had each contributed their typical brutality and cowardice to the affair.

"After that it went off like a bomb. In five minutes every African in town was throwing stones at any Asian shop or car he could see. Just like zero hour. Wouldn't surprise me if they planned the whole thing. And that includes having one of their own children run down . . ."

She stepped out into the garden.

After two weeks her parents were to go to a sundowner.

She didn't consider going, though she saw from the invitation on the mantelpiece that she had been included. Her name was in a different ink as if it had been added. "Have you heard, the Carew girl's back with her parents. I suppose we should ask her."

For the first time for many days she felt a little anger. "Think how embarrassing if she came. It's her parents I'm sorry for. Imagine how they must feel." It was a strange sensation, depended on belief in herself, the certainty that she was right and they were wrong, things she could no longer feel. She lay on her bed, tracing the thin cracks in the distemper. They never said these things to her face, so that she could answer. It was so unfair . . . She got up quickly and went to the sitting room mantelpiece, frightened that the ink might be all the same colour, some trick of the light . . . But it wasn't.

She knew then that she would go. Perhaps because it didn't matter any more it seemed unexpectedly easy.

The next hours were the worst. Her decision took all the anger from her. It was impossible to remember why she had felt angry. She could remember the exact things she had known they were saying about her but they meant nothing. She hadn't the courage yet to tell her parents, imagining the way they would look at her with worry. When she told them she must be strong enough not to listen to their answers which would remind her of her failure. Perhaps she need never tell them.

Perhaps no one need ever know about her silly moment of courage. At six she bathed and dressed in her green cocktail dress. She came out quickly, afraid they might have left.

They tried not to show their astonishment. She wondered whether she had been unfair and they were pleased.

"Don't you think you should take a coat, dear? It gets chilly later."

"I'm all right, Mother."

"I'll take a spare one just in case."

If only she wouldn't speak. In a moment she knew she must burst into tears and run back into the house and another chance would be lost, perhaps her last.

They came into a square white hall and her parents went to hang their coats and she thought she would go ahead of them, but saw beyond the doorway the party among the chintz armchairs and shivered and waited in the shadows near the eight foot potted rubber tree. But when they came down she could not bear to go in with them and climbed to the bathroom. She stayed there several minutes till she was sure they had gone. They were still in the hall.

"Hallo dear, we wondered what had happened." They had had to wait so long that they had been brought drinks.

"Nothing happened, Mother."

The heads all turned of course. She wanted to disappear in front of these unfriendly staring people. She knew how

pale she looked except for the silly patches of rouge on her cheeks, how her eyes seemed sunk into her head. Then they were turning away, back to their mild flirtations, the people they could only just think of things to say to, the people they were listening to who had been impatient at this interruption.

A second later a worse fear came to her. Suppose Tony were here. It was the sort of party he might come to. How had she failed to think of this? She turned and might have left but Mrs. Quailes was behind her and put a glass of yellow drink into her hand.

"Have one of these dear, it'll do you good."

"Oh . . ."

"Sorry you haven't been well."

She was a heavy jolly woman with six children. She continually encouraged the party, making people dance, stirring them up to do more amusing things than talk. Twice Heather saw her stop a record her husband had chosen and start a faster one. Once at the far side of the room a gorilla man of fifty staggered several paces with her sprawled across his back. Perhaps it was a bet.

Heather kept still, not trying yet to join. She was glad no one asked her to dance. It was only when she saw her mother watching her from near the log fire that she wished she could have been talking or at least listening. But she didn't move or pretend, stayed there alone, watching what was happening. Just to stay and not run away was important.

"What a lot of cold people there are here tonight. I don't like cold people."

The woman kept her big middle-aged but still pretty face close to her man. In daylight it probably had loose flesh. Heather knew at once that the remark was meant for her. It was her cold influence that was destroying the party.

In spite of it people stayed, as if there was still more chance they would be amused here than at home. At one moment there was a team game. A person from each team ran in turn to an apple on a chair, gripped it with their

buttocks, carried it back to their bucket and, still without handling it, dropped it in.

It was the first unqualified success of the party. The teams cheered. It was difficult for girls with wide dresses. Some crouched over the apple for thirty seconds, trying to wedge it, hopelessly hindered by layers of clothing. Others boldly threw up their skirts and gripped it among the frills of their petticoats. Whichever they did Mrs. Quail gave new howls of laughter, wiping away tears on the back of her thick sun-reddened forearms.

The dancing began again and a tall young man with pale short hair stood in front of her. "May I?"

She wanted to tell him that he shouldn't do things for pity, then there seemed no point. He danced well, holding her formally at a distance so that their bodies barely touched, leading her clearly so that she ceased to be muddled and could follow. They danced a waltz and then a hot number and he turned her once under his arm.

He said, "You know Tony Marlow?"

She stared at him, not yet able to believe that it was a casual inquiry, gave a quick nod.

"He's been looking for you."

She shook her head.

"Matter of fact he seemed a bit pressed." He tried to turn her again but she was unprepared and they came to a shuffling halt.

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, you know: mind set on one thing to the exclusion of all else. Not the most communicative chap at the best of times."

"I've been staying at Karen," but she hardly thought about what she said, no longer felt any doubt that it was true. "If I thought you were having an affair with him . . ."

His slowness was the surprising thing, then knowing Tony, less surprising. She could imagine how his anger would not grow less but increase as the days passed. Surely in a

fortnight he could have found her. Suddenly she understood that he must believe she had run away.

If she could do such a cowardly thing she was no longer worth his anger. She was filled with a terrible impatience to show herself to him to prove that it wasn't true. She could not bear him to think this a moment longer.

The fair young man was holding out his hand to ask her to dance again.

"Excuse me." She hurried down the edge of the dancers towards the door. He came after her, not understanding.

"Are you all right?"

"Yes, thanks."

But when he had gone she was unsure what to do and a minute later had to hunt for him, in a sudden panic that he had left. He was dancing with another short dark girl.

"Do you know where Tony's living?"

They danced on, unable to believe that they could be interrupted and she had to go after them and ask again more loudly.

"In a guest house off Riverside Drive." She made him describe it carefully. When they danced on he was explaining her astonishing behaviour to the dark girl and she gave a half suppressed giggle.

"I'm a bit tired, Mother."

"Of course, dear."

They were half sorry to leave, had enjoyed the determined gaiety, the apples and buckets. She had seen her father watching and grinning, remembering how he would have joined. It had made her love him again as she had loved him as a child, feeling his inadequacy to deal with the world, so that he needed to be protected from it, because it did not understand his innocence.

She could tell they had enjoyed it by the way they talked on the way home, reminding each other of the people they had met, leaving her to sit quietly on the back seat, forgetting to be concerned for her. Their low questions and



answers were a familiar background from her childhood, the words she did not yet know, the hints she could not yet understand, doing it when they were happy.

"Would you like the window shut, dear?"

"Thank you, Mother." She must be good now, though not suspiciously; exhausted but no worse. Her mother would be watching for that.

She could hear them still talking in the bathroom, then more faintly through a second door in their bedroom. She allowed them another half-hour then dressed and went out.

No moon tonight, just the bright stars, and a faint scent of wood smoke. She tried to set her car rolling down the drive, afraid of its noise, but it was too heavy and she sat in it and started it, her heart thumping, and drove quickly away. Looking back at the low square house she saw it still dark when she crossed the dry stream bed and turned out of sight.

She drove into town but turned at Dagoretti and crossed among the trees and shrubberies of residential roads. As soon as the houses were a few years old the trees grew up and hid them and the creepers covered the hedges. Their mauve and violet blossoms were pale and colourless in her headlights. Once there was the sickly smell of frangipani, a cloud of perfume which had spread over the road in the still night.

Past Government House, a white shape between the sentry-boxes at the far end of the drive, across Nairobi River with its notice-board warnings against bilharzia, then the short climb to Riverside Drive. After five hundred yards she found the nameboard, turned in and saw the guest house across a stretch of grey lawn. There were lights in its windows.

She saw him at once, for he hadn't drawn the curtains. Though it was after one he was sitting in shirt and trousers in an armchair. The chair was tall and narrow, seeming to force him to set his arms on its arms because there wasn't

room inside. It frightened her to see him sitting here, doing nothing at one in the morning.

When she knocked there was a long pause, as if he might have moved quickly to some place where he could look out, then a small noise just inside the door and immediately it opened.

"Hallo, Tony."

"Hallo." He stood in the doorway, waiting for an explanation.

"May I come in?"

He opened the door wider. As she passed him she felt her back creep and imagined him lifting something heavy to strike her. She didn't hurry, half wishing for the stunning pain and annihilation. He followed her into the sitting room and shut the door. He had made no noise because he was in his socks.

He stood beyond the chair, watching her but half turned away, as if he had only just patience to let her start before moving for a drink. This was the gesture he wanted to make and her speaking was only important so that he could make it.

But he wasn't drunk, as she had guessed when she saw him through the window. There was no glass or bottle. It seemed worse that he should be sitting here at one in the morning, quite sober.

"You were looking for me, Tony."

He just went on watching her, waiting for more.

For the first time she wondered what to say. Till now the problem of escaping and finding him had seemed too formidable and her chance too slight to think beyond. Though he was still waiting for her to begin, he seemed less and less interested.

He was so sure he was right to force her to explain. He was so unfair. "Tony, it was you who wanted to see me."

He just stared heavily. Suddenly she understood that he wasn't angry. He treated her without interest, as if what she

had done had finally put her outside the possibility of sympathy or even blame, just made her another enemy.

"You seem to think I should be apologising," she began.

"I didn't say so."

His voice shocked her, making her realise that she had been having the whole argument with herself. She went on slowly and carefully:

"Tony, it's you who must apologise. It was you who interfered where you weren't invited or wanted. He had a right to an explanation. That was why he came. I had to apologise—for myself and for you."

"Is that all?" Tony said.

She started to answer but he hadn't finished.

"If you tell me that was all he came for I shall believe you. I may not want to but I shall have to."

She could only sit there, looking down at his big feet in grey socks set on the boards, knowing how easy it would have been to nod her head to tell him it was true, knowing that he had made it impossible.

When he was sure that she wouldn't answer he no longer watched her but stood at the window, his hands in his pockets, looking out at the dark night.

Presently he said, "I blame myself."

"Yes, you should," she said, crying now with anger. "I suppose it's the first time you've thought of that . . ."

"I should never have let you go."

"You couldn't have stopped me. What right have you to tell me where I shall go?"

He ignored her, crossed to the mantelpiece, lit a cigarette. "I didn't think he'd dare."

"What do you mean, dare?" But she didn't ask again. Suddenly it explained everything; why he had wanted to see her; why, now that he had asked his single question there was nothing more to say. Not to her. She was appalled that she could have been so self-centred, assuming it was only herself who was in danger.

His unemphatic tone told her that his anger had changed too. It wasn't bitter now. There was no need. Bitterness came from uncertainty, inaction.

"Tony, what are you going to do?"

He showed no surprise at the question. Presently he shook his head. It was no longer any business of hers.

"Oh, Tony . . ." But he moved to the door and held it open. There was nothing more to say.

She had never felt so worthless. For the first time she suspected that instead of helping him as she had thought she might it was her own foolish interference that had made his quarrel with his life and his country irrevocable.

She thought desperately for some way, not to excuse herself, but to persuade him that even if he could never again care for her, he must for his own sake be careful. She could think of nothing. She went quickly out of the door, not daring to look back and see him standing there in his grey socks.

## Chapter Twenty-six

SHE must stay, though she could think of nothing to do. The mischief you caused didn't cease when you ran away, at least he had taught her that. It went on growing and spreading. But she didn't look for reasons, knowing where the careful reasoning she had used on her life had led. As she turned past her nameboard, into her drive she thought that her parents might have let her house.

She went on thinking it as she turned the key in the latch and came into the dark sitting room, and softly pushed the bedroom door then quickly switched the light. There was no one in her bed.

After that there was no need to look at anything else. It would all be exactly as she left it fifteen days ago. She lay on her bed, then undressed and put on pyjamas. All the time she wondered why she did it. It was like a hen running round a yard without its head, stumbling and falling but unable to stop its futile running. Half an hour later, as she lay in the darkness there was a car in her drive.

She stood at the window, her heart beating fast, looking through the burglar netting. It circled and stopped below the trees. They were getting out. She heard doors opening and their low voices as they made confused movements. Then they were coming and she switched on her light.

She went quickly down the passage and opened the front door. She waited at the veranda window, standing with her back to the sitting room, tying the belt of her cherry pink dressing gown—but they were too long and she turned, afraid that they had somehow reached the room in silence and were now watching her. She was astonished to realise that they could not even have reached the house because there was still

no sound, hurried to the passage wondering if they had driven away. After a second they came into sight beyond the front doorway, still only just finishing crossing the drive.

They came down the passage, moving clumsily, her mother with both hands out, touching the walls. They wore coats and moved like old people afraid of mats or steps, then stood blinking in the bright light of the sitting room. A moment later her mother was coming to kiss her, with warm spontaneous relief, but she was too slow and Heather stood beyond an armchair, glancing back for other places to retreat to. There was no need to let her win so easily, dictating that it should be a scene of tenderness and grateful tears.

"Heather dear, what happened?" She was hurt and puzzled.

"Nothing, Mother."

"Why are you here?"

"It's where I live."

"I know that dear." She was hurt again to have her kindness snubbed. She honestly thought it was kindness.

"You've given us rather a scare," her father said.

"I'm sorry."

"We found your empty bed," her mother said.

"I was going to ring in the morning."

"We came here at once but you weren't here. Where have you been?"

But she didn't see why they should force her to lie.

Her mother sighed heavily at this new obstinacy. "Anyhow we've found you dear. Is there anything you'd like to collect while you're here?"

She was shocked to realise how hard she still had to fight, knowing that at any moment she might ask herself why she bothered.

"I'm not coming, Mother."

"You can't stay here, all by yourself."

"I did before."

Her mother left the words to answer themselves. She made her afraid as she often did that she had not realised the

seriousness of her illness, that there were things which in kindness they had not told her, which made her gesture of revolt ridiculous.

"I'm better, Mother. Can't you see?" She tried to speak in a low calm voice.

"There's no reason to come with you. I don't want to run away any more."

They stared at her, not trying to understand, knowing that these could only be new symptoms.

"I'm not mad," she said. "Perhaps I was but I'm not any more."

"Heather, dear . . ."

They watched her with more and more anxiety, trying to stop her talking, as if afraid that her words would become so terrible that they might do her some worse injury.

"If I was mad I should care whether you believed me but I don't I don't care about anything. I don't care if you drag me away. I shall scream, of course, but I shan't care."

"Please, darling."

She thought perhaps the thing they were finding most disturbing was that she didn't cry. She was completely without feeling, except for a sudden great tiredness. If only they would go away and let her lie down and sleep.

Her mother said, "But there isn't a crumb in the house."

She could have laughed at the idea that she would want to eat.

"Mwengo and I cleared it all out."

She was angry then, and surprised too, that her mother had been unable to prevent herself at the last moment snatching at her victory to make it final.

"I shall be all right, Mother."

"Darling, come with us now. If you're still feeling well in the morning we'll bring you over properly and set you up again."

She shook her head, no longer frightened, winning now.

As they went, feeling and shuffling down the passage, she

wanted to run after them and tell them it wasn't their fault, not more than hers and everyone else's.

She lay quietly in the darkness. She mustn't think, that was important. Just lie still and not let the ideas start racing after each other. She must invent a new life which could be led without ideas. That had been her mistake, to imagine that intelligence had any value. For some people perhaps. Not for her. Now that her parents had gone she wasn't tired any more, or unhappy. She wasn't happy either, or angry or indignant or hopeful or unhelpful. She was nothing. She honestly thought she might be learning some new way of living with herself—till about seven o'clock. It was light in her room though she was still in bed. She knew then what she should have done.

She should have refused to leave him till he had promised.

It was so simple that she hunted in her mind for something she had left out which would have made it impossible. It was like a discovery in a dream which when she woke would become absurd. But she couldn't see why.

Promise what she wasn't sure. Just that he would do nothing foolish. He might of course have refused and by refusing to leave him she might or might not have been able to force him. It was her failure to ask that she found so astonishing. At once she saw that her calm had been based on a new conceit: that she had done her best and failed.

Once he had promised she knew he would keep it.



## Chapter Twenty-seven

SHE drove into town, caught for ten minutes in the morning stream of cars at the Highway roundabout. It was a grey overcast day and there were spots of rain on her windscreen.

At last she could turn, and drive fast between gardens of dark trees, then in at the gate. She hurried across the lawn, down a stone path which she had missed in the night and knocked at the guest house door. There was no sound. She waited in the damp morning, hearing from all over town the hum of traffic, engines revving, distant horns, once unexpectedly close a high squeal of tyres but no crash.

She began to look through the windows. Inside the second she saw his bed, the sheets pushed back, his schoolboy pyjamas of blue and pink stripes hanging from the edge.

She had no idea what to do, went all round the guest house and knocked again, then sat in her car. Perhaps he would have forgotten something and in a moment drive up. It was the sort of thing which happened. Perhaps if she wished for it as hard as she could. She started the engine and drove out of town to Mitchell Park.

The showground was deserted, most of the stands boarded, a few people on others, loading planks into lorries. She drove down the empty avenues to the arena, turned across its end and stopped where she and Lucy had seen him.

At first she thought this stand too was empty, then something fell with a clatter inside. She climbed to the concrete forecourt and stood at the door.

"Is Mr. Marlow here?"

For ten seconds he didn't turn, straining to tear away a display panel. When it wouldn't come he let go, allowing his open hands to relax slowly.

"He is not," he said, still watching them.

"Are you expecting him?"

He thought about that. "I wouldn't say expecting. The fact is he hasn't visited us for a couple of weeks and when he does I shall only have one thing to say to Mr. Marlow: 'Clear out.'"

"Oh, why?" she said, but she wasn't sure what made her ask, could hardly bear to wait while his mind invented its ponderous answer. "Thank you . . ."

"The fact is, my dear, we need fellows who're a wee bit more reliable than Mr. Marlow. He's a nice chap and all that, but we need ones who don't just turn up when they're in the mood."

"Surely he works."

"Don't get me wrong, my dear. I like him. I like him so much I'd like to see more of him . . ."

But she couldn't bear to listen, didn't understand how she had been drawn into this idiotic argument.

"The fact is, my dear, I hate to say it but Mr. Marlow had a number of outside interests, really a surprising number even for such a good looking fellow . . ."

"How do you know?" she said. "You can't know . . ."

He stared at her, surprised because he had not meant to hurt, prevented by his heavy jocular style from an easy apology.

She drove back to town. The low grey cloud hung over the offices and the tyres of the cars hissed on the wet roads. She parked behind the post office and hurried past the multi-storey garage, the city hall, through the plate glass doors, confused then by the polished cars with white walled tyres but no one attending them. A hundred feet away, at the far end of the room, two men were near a maroon American model with maroon tail fins, each propped by a hand against its roof.

As she went towards them she became more certain that they were customers—or perhaps her tired shabby appearance made it so impossible that she could want to buy a car that they could ignore her.

"Are you Mr. Gayfield?"

They exchanged a glance before one turned to her, the other lifting his free hand to examine his short clean nails.

"Could you help me? I have to find Mr. Marlow."

He stared for several seconds, as though to discover if this was some joke against himself. The other grinned, but still looked at his white fingers as if it was a mistake he wanted to hide.

"He doesn't work here."

"You've no idea where?"

He just went on shaking his head. She turned and hurried away among the cars, their eyes on her back.

She walked in the car parks, up and down the lanes of cars, jumping among the red mud and puddles. In one she was surprised to find a car completely stuck, its bonnet in the air, back wheels sunk to their axle. If she walked through all the car parks in town—there couldn't be more than a dozen. The rain came in heavy sheets and she ran for the Coffee Bar.

The same office workers who had forgotten breakfast, the same actor reading a book or perhaps another, presently the same expensive Indian with a new American girl as thin and bright with auburn hair. A few weeks ago she had sat here with Tony when he was a car salesman. She guessed that the things he had told her about the end of that job had been a small part of the story.

She began to argue with him. "But Tony, even if everything you thought was right you couldn't do it." He listened with the silent obstinacy which always reduced her words to self-deception. "Tony, of course I don't know what you're going to do because you won't tell me—that's how I know it's wrong." This time she could not afford to be ashamed because there might be no other time. Then she was thinking of his boy's pyjamas on his empty bed and how he would have dropped them carelessly, and how he would despise her sentimental feelings about them which she too despised. He was always facing ahead, never bothering to notice the mean

people he passed or answer their hesitations. She had never known him doubt what he should think or do . . . She wondered if ironically this was to be a start of remembering only the good things about him, like someone who was dead. She wondered if she could bear it, feeling already her eyes full of tears to think how she could have loved him.

If only he had been a little more tolerant, less sure he was right. But she was only saying if only he had been less like Tony. It was suddenly clear to her what a silly mistake she had made by confusing love with approval. Of course she had loved him but hadn't allowed herself to give it that name because of some idiotic belief that true love should be for something perfect. She understood that this might be the antithesis of the truth because if someone was perfect there might be nothing to love.

If only she had known earlier, if only she had understood that you could not have two stupid proud people. She stared out of the open café doorway, the heavy rain beating on the road and pavement, occasional umbrellas hurrying past, water running from them in continuous streams. She noticed her cold coffee and drank it quickly but she couldn't go out in this rain. It didn't matter because there was nowhere to go.

When the rain stopped she walked about the wet streets. At twelve-thirty she went to two restaurants which she had heard him talk about but he wasn't there and hadn't booked. She drove slowly home. At the Fort Hall roundabout she thought of the club. She hurried then, ran quickly into her sitting room to telephone.

"Is Mr. Marlow there. I want to speak to him. Hallo, hallo . . ." but the boy had gone. She doubted whether he had got the name.

"Hallo."

"Tony, is that you?" She had ceased to believe she would find him. She was completely surprised, too many things to say and no idea which she had decided was best. He waited for her to explain.

"Tony, could I see you?" She tried to sound casual, not to frighten him.

"Do you want to?"

"I wouldn't be ringing."

"What about tomorrow evening?" He sounded strange and distant as if he was making some private joke.

"Oh, no, Tony." She had been too casual, hadn't convinced him of the urgency. "Tony, I'd like to come now."

"You can't do that."

"Well, soon, Tony. This afternoon."

"Tonight," he said flatly, as if it was a possibility she had forced him to admit.

"Is that the soonest?"

"That's right."

"What time, Tony?"

"Seven-thirty."

"Where?"

He paused. "Upstairs at the Stanley."

She was suspicious of the way he seemed uninterested in the details, wondered desperately how to make him do nothing before then.

"Tony, you promise you'll come?"

After a pause he said, "All right." She believed he hadn't meant to.

## Chapter Twenty-eight

RAIN came at six, bringing the day to an early close, then stopped and the roads were steaming in her headlights as she drove to town. The Highway was busy tonight, a continuous stream of headlights passing in the opposite lane. Friday was a favourite night for entertaining: Robinson had sometimes been booked five Fridays ahead.

She saw him with relief on a high stool by the bar, then with amazement realised that he wasn't alone. It was so unlike him. She was sure he had arranged it, or suggested this place where he knew he could find a friend.

He saw her as she passed the bamboo partition but didn't stand. That wasn't like him either. He watched her over the shoulder of his friend. Perhaps the friend was telling him a story he didn't want to interrupt, but when she came close they weren't talking. It was Bertie Gaymer.

"Hallo," Bertie said.

They both stood then. Tony was drunk all right tonight. He missed his balance as he got off the stool, put out a hand to the bar. Not violently or stupidly drunk, just full of drink. She could tell by every slow deliberate move. When the stool tipped away from him as if it might fall he didn't grab it but watched it tilt, hesitate, then settle back on its legs.

They had two drinks. She didn't try to talk, saving her energy. She wondered what Bertie knew. He didn't say much, as if he might not have been told she was coming.

She became more and more astonished that Tony should protect himself in such a cowardly way, thought in a minute she would tell him so. After an hour Tony said, "We're going to the Tyrollean. Coming?"

"Both of you?"

"That's it."

Their table was in a recess between dark wood partitions under the dark beams of the imitation mountain farmhouse. Across the corner above Tony's head was an imitation black wood hay rack. Tony ordered whisky.

It was nine-thirty and the place was filling fast, half the tables taken, the rest reserved. An African band played and a half caste singer, with a tower of fuzzy hair and narrow skirts divided at the sides to show her coffee coloured thighs in net nylons, sang into a silver microphone. African waiters in Tyrollean waistcoats decorated with little mountain flowers hurried between the tables, their black lumpy faces running with sweat.

Many of the people here were Asians, smartly suited groups of men sitting together, only at one table a woman in a sari with them. There were no Africans and she thought they must be excluded. She was calmer now, knowing that she would stay with him till he let her speak.

They didn't ask her to dance. She couldn't think why they had come here and sometimes it seemed that they might be laughing at her. Perhaps without her they would have found amusement. She felt more sure of this as she watched the crowd at the bar, who scarcely talked, just stood, taking occasional mouthfuls of beer, their eyes moving about the room. She had never seen men so obviously hunting.

She recognised the young man from the cheese and bacon counter at her grocer's. It gave her a clue about who these curious Europeans must be; the poor whites the Colonial Office had tried to exclude and so made the problem worse because the Indians had come instead, keeping Europeans and Africans more rigidly apart. He was a fair young man with a vague manner who took her order with apparent understanding and often showed a moment later that he had failed to hear. Holding a glass in one hand, he gave the same impression of looking over her shoulder at something more interesting.

Beyond was a sallow Indian with side-whiskers who had been staring at her since they arrived, seeming to think that because he was doing it between two other people she could not notice. Once when he caught her eye he tried a grin.

Closer, and one of his shields, was an imitation army officer. Ginger moustache, red cadaverous face, long prominent white cuffs, gold signet ring. It was the too long cuffs which gave him away, turned the whole act from upper class conformity into shabbiness.

She could imagine clearly how they were all pretending, the people they claimed to know, the conversation turned to the new car. They shuddered at themselves, trying by their pretences to avoid their shame at what they were, not realising that it could only be escaped by accepting themselves entirely.

Tony wasn't ashamed. Compared to these sad Indians imitating Europeans, salesmen imitating army officers, Tony was real and rather fine. He despised the qualities he hadn't got and this seemed better than despising those he had, not morally better, just more as things should be.

She was so sure that the whole evening was a plan against her that she was astonished when Bertie Gaymer went by himself to the lavatory. This was the chance she had needed and she gathered quickly the courage to say what she had to say.

"Tony."

He glanced round, surprised she thought, to see that he was alone with her.

"Tony, you must listen to me. Nothing happened. Do you hear, Tony. Nothing."

But he only stared and she saw with horror that she was too late. He knew why she was saying it. He was free not to believe her. It only made him despise her more that from fear she should lie and try to trick him.

Suddenly she knew that she must tell him about herself and her mistake. She might not have another chance. She



did not expect it to change things, was not sure that she wanted them changed. She only knew that she must explain.

"Tony, it was all such a shock."

"What was a shock?"

"Coming back to Kenya. After all that waiting and preparation. I didn't realise that it wasn't Kenya I was preparing for."

"What was it then?"

But she couldn't go on, his hard drunken questions making her want to cry. She sat with her head down, her hands in her lap, forcing back the tears. Perhaps he noticed because he said less roughly, "Tell me then."

"You, of course, Tony."

He didn't answer. After several seconds, though she still couldn't look at him, his silence gave her courage to believe that he was understanding.

"But you weren't here. Then when you came . . ."

"What?"

"I thought you'd changed, Tony," she said quietly, looking up at him through wet eyes.

He shook his head. Presently he said, "Ever wonder if it was a shock to me?"

"What, Tony?"

"To find you'd changed."

It was just another brutal argument.

"Never occur to you that I'd been waiting?"

"It's not true, Tony."

He shrugged his shoulders. He looked down, twisting the whisky glass, draining it.

"But you must know, Tony. You can't say that sort of thing unless you know."

"Doesn't much matter."

She knew then that it was true, was astonished that she had not understood. He must have loved her to go on trying to help her. It was the only way to explain how long he had taken to give her up.

Suddenly she believed in him waiting for her, building her up while she was away, not just any girl, his girl, who was ill but would come back, not a girl to be casually touched or kissed or taken to bed. Too good for that. It was only when she had destroyed herself for him that he had tried.

"Oh, Tony, why didn't you tell me?"

But there was nothing to say. Nothing to do except slowly understand how everything might have happened differently but for her blindness, which had made her never think possible the thing she wanted most.

Bertie was coming and Tony went towards him. They passed two tables away, might have said something to each other, she wasn't sure, then Tony had gone towards the lavatory and Bertie was standing by her chair, asking her to dance. She refused, of course, then to avoid sitting with him came.

It was a long dance, each time the band stopped the dancers clapping for more. They grew a little excited. The half caste singer was excited too, wriggling her bottom with a strong fixed smile, marching across the platform, breasts thrust forward, kneeling up her split skirt, holding the microphone like a band major. Bertie danced carefully, then with more interest, as if letting himself be pulled along a step behind the general violence. When they sat at their table Tony was still away.

"He'll be at the bar," Bertie said.

But she stood and looked carefully and was sure he wasn't.

"Or found himself a partner." But the band had stopped, the floor emptying.

"He's gone."

"Oh, I doubt it."

"You know he has. He told you to dance with me."

She saw it was true from his surprise at how fast she had guessed, not yet ready with his answer.

"Where's he gone?" She leaned across the table at him.

"Tell me where he's gone."

He was embarrassed by the noise she was making, people turning to stare, leant back to dissociate himself. "We have yet to establish . . ."

"Tell me," she said, her face close to his, not too sorry that she accidentally spat, but he only leant further away, laughing uneasily, wiping his cheek with the back of his pink hand.

"All right." She bent for her bag, began to move quickly between the tables towards the door.

He came after her. "Where are you going?" He tried to dodge round a table to get ahead.

"To find him."

"Won't that be difficult?"

He was right, of course, but it only made her more certain of what she must do.

"I must warn the police." She should have done it hours ago, in the early morning, was sick with anger that she should have trusted herself and failed.

"Whatever for?"

"They must find him."

"There's no need for that."

"Of course there is. He's going to kill someone. Don't you know?"

But she could see by his vacant stare that he had no idea.

"Who's he going to kill?"

"William Ndolo."

"Oh, really," he began. His tone changed. He had put her into some category, classified her as mad, to be humoured. "Let me drive you."

"No, no." She could laugh at that, wanted to tell him he must try harder.

"I'll come with you."

She shrugged her shoulders, moving quickly through the foyer—a turbaned Sikh held back by two others from hitting the Italian manager—on to the gravel.

"I'll see if his car's gone," Bertie said, but she ignored him,

hurrying for a taxi. There were several together under some trees and she sat in one and Bertie climbed in as it moved away. She knew by his silence that he had looked and found she was right.

As they drove downhill into the town he said, "Heather, he asked me to look after you."

"So you knew he was going."

"I didn't know what he meant. To be honest I thought he'd got his eye on some piece. I know what he meant now. He was going to hunt for talent somewhere else."

"Do you expect me to believe that?"

"Of course. Look, I don't want to tell you this but if you make me—the fact is Tony's a pretty virile sort of chap. Can't make do on fresh air and promises—never could."

"I know that." She was sure it made no difference. He understood so little that she tried to stop his pointless talking. Compared to her certainty it was hopelessly improbable.

They stood at the counter in the police hut and the two African corporals stood behind, clean, efficient and utterly useless. They had sent for the duty officer and showed no more interest. They could see her terrible anxiety but it had absolutely no effect. Or perhaps they couldn't see it. At moments like this they seemed like another sort of animal. After ten minutes he came.

"Good evening." He was young and fair with a thin cunning face. He had been woken and could only just be civil.

"I want you to help me find Tony Marlow."

But she made it easy for him. He walked down the counter for the report book and opened it with slow care, allowing an entry on another page to catch his attention for a second. He rejected the pencil the corporal offered and went into the back office for another. He came back examining its point and went on with this for ten seconds before he looked at the calendar and wrote the date. He looked at his watch and wrote the time.

"Name?"

"Carew."

"Miss Carew. What can we do for you?"

"I want you to find someone. Tony Marlow. It's urgent."

He waited as if she had yet to say something worth recording.

"Who is Mr. Marlow?"

"A friend of mine."

"When did you last see him."

"He was at a club with me. He left."

"Miss Carew, if we were to go hunting for every man who walks out on a girl in a night club . . ."

"It's not like that."

"Miss Carew, even suppose I believe you . . ."

"But you must."

"Just for argument, let's say you totally convince me. What can I do at this hour? If we turned out the whole force it might take all night to trace a single person."

It was going to be as bad as she feared. "He's going to kill someone."

He gave her a quick glance, then wrote in the report book with the short pencil, not bending to do it.

"William Ndolo."

He stopped writing and stared.

"Of course it sounds fantastic. It's true. You must believe it's true." But the more excited she became the less he believed her.

"You must protect him. You know where he is. You follow him all day."

"And what do you think about all this, sir?" the policeman said to Bertie.

"Beats me," Bertie said. He tipped his head forward and scratched the back of his neck. He seemed genuinely puzzled. "What he said to me was, 'I've had all I can take.'"

She wanted to tell him that he wasted time by speaking to Bertie.

"And why would your friend Mr. Marlow be going to kill Mr. Ndolo?"

"It's not 'so unlikely," she said. "He's an African politician. He hates him."

"On political grounds?" the policeman said, glancing at the book, deciding not to write. She began to hope she was persuading him.

"Miss Carew, there are plenty of Europeans who have no use for Mr. Ndolo but they don't go around trying to kill him."

"He thinks I slept with him."

She kept quite still, her face burning, staring at the pale hands of the policeman on the report book.

"You want me to write that, Miss Carew?"

"I don't care what you write."

He seemed convinced at last and she wanted to cry with gratitude to this horrible man for believing her.

He went into a back room and through a glass window she could see him telephoning, one arm and shoulder and sometimes as he leant back the side of his face and uniform cap.

They were going then, across the car park to the police cars. There were other people moving in the darkness. Glancing back as they bounced in the ruts at the entrance she saw a second police Peugeot following.

She sat behind with one of the African corporals and in the folding seats Bertie sat with the other. There were two European policemen now, side by side in front, not speaking. After two turns she guessed where they were going.

They parked in the narrow side street she remembered. It might have been still and dark, with people passing quickly in the shadows, but for the music coming loudly from the third floor windows of the Fig Tree club.

It was fast and exciting, then seemed to stop, but after a second in the silence she could hear the drummer drumming. Although she was half expecting it she shivered as she had

shivered four months before. She remembered how the hot excited dancers had gone on turning with an unexpected continuous rustle of clothes in this beating silence. She remembered the tightly packed tables of soldiers, their faces staring up as she danced with William—and how his friends had shaken his hand and held his arm, slapping his back, as if they all needed to touch him; and how they had asked her to sit with them and she had believed she was at last being allowed to join and help. It seemed so long ago. The band was playing again, light and musical, then blaring and discordant.

They were asking her to cross with them but she couldn't. "I'll wait."

They were gone five minutes, came back, a curious vulnerable file, stooping through the street doorway, watched and despised by the group of Africans on the pavement.

"Mr. Marlow hasn't been seen, and Mr Ndolo is still expected."

She had a new idea, glanced quickly at the nearest parked cars, guessing that this was where he would be, crouched in his front seat, watching for him to arrive. They drove slowly along both sides of the street and she looked at the parked cars. None of them was Tony's.

They drove across town, the second police car still following, and she directed them down Riverside Drive, in through the white gates. She ran in front, along the stone path, the guest house dark ahead, as she had known it would be. She stood at the doorway and rang, and already turned to call that he wasn't here when there was a new light on the lawn. She knew that it came from his bedroom window.

He stood inside the doorway, in his striped pyjamas, and she tried to go past but he made no move to let her. Behind she could hear their boots coming closer on the stones.

"What are you doing here?"

"I don't know," she said. "I just don't know."

"Have you brought these men?"

"I thought you were going to kill him, Tony. Tony, you were going to kill him, weren't you?"

He stared heavily at her. For a second she felt a wild hope that he was going to save her.

"I don't know what you're talking about."